

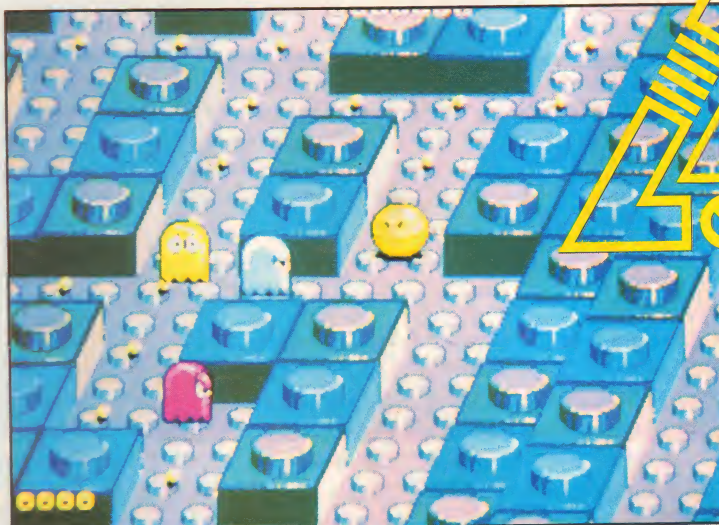
PACMANIA

T

here seems to be a craze at the moment for updating classic games- Defender and Space Invaders have both had fairly recent facelifts, and Apocalypse from Image Works is very similar to Choplifter. And now Tengen are treating us to another slice of the early eighties with a 3-D version of Pacman- Pacmania. Hooray!

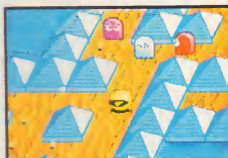
The aim of the game in Pacmania is just that of the original; you, as a hungry yellow ball must speed around a variety of maze like complexes, munching the little yellow pills that are scattered around. As you do, you will be pursued by ghosts who, upon coming in contact with you, will use up one of your (five) lives. You can however eat special power up pills, bigger and more scarce than your ordinary pill, to turn the tables and eat the ghosts for a limited period of time. Upon being eaten, the spectres will return to their 'hideout' and regenerate themselves, ready to kill you again, the blighters!

Once you have stuffed yourself with all the pills to be had in the maze you're in, you are supplied with a hefty points bonus and transported to the next stage- which is exactly the same as the one you've just completed, only a different colour. After that you may proceed to the next world, of which there are four- Block Town, The Pacman Theatre, Sandbox World and the Jungly Steps. Pacmania's front end allows you to choose where you'd like to begin out of the first three; to enter the Jungly Steps you must complete Sandbox World. The frontend also allows you to set the difficulty setting and your preferred arrangement for the speed inducing 'power pac'-



(Above) Wacca Waccal Things aren't so tough among the lego bricks of Blocktown, where the maze layout is simple and the ghosts are decidedly dumb. Easy peasy!

(Below) Inky, Blinky and co. get smarter as Paccy progresses through the levels. Once you get to the jungle level, it's like the have PhD's in advanced chasing!



you can have it always off, always on, or implemented in-game at the touch of a button. So eat pills, avoid/eat ghosts and complete all four levels to finally return to Blocktown and begin again on a slightly harder setting.

And that's it. Pacman was unbelievably addictive- even my mum used to sneak goes on it and this game could have been easily as good, but is let down by of a few very irritating flaws. The graphics serve their purpose but in no way suggest Megadrive quality. The same is true of the annoying sound- a different but equally irritating ditty plays through all four levels, so it's a good job there is an option to turn it off. But the graphics are the biggest disappointment of the two- check out the screenshots. Ugh! Amstrad CPC64 revisited, complete with ropey collision detection and jerky scrolling. Indeed the presentation throughout is decidedly lacking.

But hey, graphics and sound don't mean anything, as long as the gameplay's there- and with Pacmania gamepley is very, er, dull. At times the controls are disastrously unresponsive- many a time, facing a jumping ghost I tried to flee- in vein. And the gameplay is heavily hampered by the lack of levels- only (pah!) four! It's just completely unrealistic, and it won't hold many people's attention span for long.

Despite all this, some of classic Pacman's playability manages to shine through, especially on 'crazy' (ie. very fast) mode. This is not enough though to reproduce Master System pacmania, which was excellent. Tengen might seriously expect someone to stomp up thirty five quid for this contrived old scrap, but I don't

●David Fitzgerald

£49.99
OUT NOW



A touch of Pacman's original gameplay.

Graphics, sound, lack of levels, bad collision detection, jerky scrolling, poor control.

850 MEGADRIVING
G IQ A FF
4 5 4 5

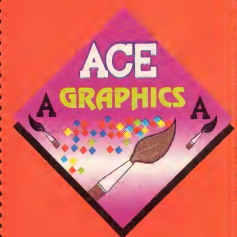
All right, all right, you will play it quite consistently for a few days, intermittently howling with frustration, and after a little while you'll give up on it. Bland graphics, bland sound, bland gameplay, bland presentation, bland... (etc). What rot! Pacmania is a wasted opportunity to bring a classic game to the Megadrive- perhaps if Tecmagik had overseen the conversion, this review would have been a much more admiring affair. But they didn't, so this isn't.

PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE



5
4
3
2
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PACMANIA RATINGS



£34.99
OUT NOW



More depth than most platform games.

Superbly playable.

Brilliant graphics and sound.



A tad slowly paced.

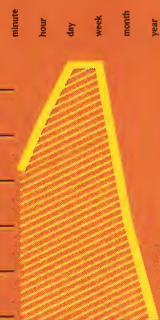
The to-ing and fro-ing can get annoying.

FAMICOM RATING **907**

G	IO	A	FF
10	4	9	9

To be honest, it's all a bit confusing at first. You start playing and are just getting into the swing of things when you're stopped by some Disney character saying you can't continue until you've found a certain item. However, this slender arcade adventure element is actually a lot less involved than it first appears and doesn't tarnish the fundamental platform action. Which, it has to be said, is a Very Good Thing, because too much faffing about would have spoiled what is possibly the best platform game on the Megadrive.

PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE



QUACKSHOT

Waaack! Old Donald Duck, eh? He may have a temper shorter than a pygmy's parts, but you can't help loving him. At least, that's what Disney think. Personally, I think he's about as funny as trapping your fingers in a door, but then what do I know? Umpteen million kids around the world can't be wrong. At least he's got a bit of pep, I suppose, which is more than can be said for most of Disney's saccharine-sweet but bland-as-blancmange cartoon characters.

For his first Megadrive outing, Sega have opted to put Donald in a platform game, much like they did with Mickey Mouse and the *Castle of Illusion*. It's a pity that Sega don't try different genres, though I guess that a Disney-based shoot-'em-up is pretty much out of the question. Pity - the thought of blasting seven bells out of Goofy, Minnie, Pluto *et al* is quite appealing.

But as long as the games are of the same high quality of this one, I shouldn't complain too loudly. As it turns out Quackshot is one of the best platform capers to appear in a long, long time. The nicely-presented cartoony intro explains the plot - while snooping around Uncle Scrooge's vast library, Donald discovers an ancient long-lost treasure map. Lured by the promise of wealth beyond even the imaginings of his Uncle, Donald sets off on an around the world treasure trail. Unfortunately Big Bad Pete and his gang hear about the hidden loot, and set off in pursuit too.

At the start of the game the player is presented with a map, and the player can choose to fly to several locations marked on it. Having made his choice, Donald is dropped off by Huey, Dewey and Louie in their fat red biplane and the game proper can begin. It's a side-ways-scrolling platform affair, with Donald able to jump, crouch and crawl around the landscapes, each packed with lifts, warp doors, quicksand and all manner of perils.

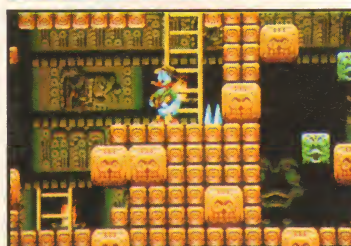
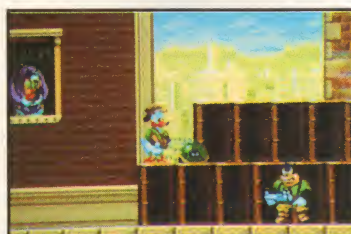
With his sink-plunger gun Donald can stun Pete and his cronies, in some cases allowing him to use them as stepping stones to higher platforms. As he progresses, Donald discovers three other weapons - a super-sucky plunger gun which he can use to climb up walls; a pop gun that sprays corn kernels in all directions; and a block-blastin' bubble-gum gun. The player can cycle through the



Duck, you... er... Duck! In the heart of Transylvania, one of Big Bad Pete's cronies crouches down to take aim at everyone's favourite foul-tempered fowl. Donald has three weapons with which he can return fire - a literally stunning sink plunger gun, a popcorn caster and a bubble gum blower. Each has limited ammo, and must be used carefully.

GREY CLOUD!

There is a mild caveat for owners of Japanese grey-imported Megadrives - the text appears in Japanese, even if you've bought an 'official' cart. Although it doesn't ruin the game, it does mean you have to do a bit more 'trial and error' exploring than normal because you don't know precisely where you're meant to be going.



(Top) More of Pete's henchmen attack in Ducksburg, and those turtles may not be teenage or mutant, but once they duck inside their shells they're impervious to Donald's attacks yet still deadly to the touch.

(Above) In the baking-hot Mexican desert Donald discovers a trap-filled Aztec temple. Here our plucky ducky must avoid all manner of spikes, firepits and falling blocks in his search for the gormless Goofy.

weapons at will, and select the best one for the current situation.

However, it's a bit more complex than that. On each level Donald will come across one of his friends who will either give him a gift to help him complete his quest or ask him for something before they'll let him pass. Donald then has to go off to another location and try to locate the required item so that he can continue. This *Cluedo*-style deductive element adds a small but nice amount of depth to the game, and prevents it just being another 'complete the levels one after the other' job.

Quackshot proves that anything Mickey can do, Donald can do better. Not only does Quackshot play like a dreamy treat, the gameplay is constantly changing, providing a constant and deeply enjoyable challenge. It's also got some of the best graphics and sound that the 'Drive's ever produced. And, unlike 99.8% (precisely) of most 'Drive games, it actually takes more than an afternoon to complete. I'd rather play this instead of *Castle of Illusion* or, for that matter, the hugely over-rated *Sonic* any day of the week. So this Xmas, forget Hype the Hedgehog and plug the Duck in your slot. You'd have to be quackers not to.

● David Upchurch



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FACTORY PANIC

are defective and have to be directed to a rubbish bin. It all starts easily, with just three or so people wanting, say, a loaf of bread. But as the game progresses, more and more people join the queue, each demanding specific items, and woe betide you if they're not kept happy.

It takes a bit of playing for Factory Panics true addictive qualities to shine through, and once they do you'll be hooked. Although not the best looking Gear game in the world, at least it's pretty clear what's going on, which is essential in this sort of game. The only niggle is that in the scrolling larger rooms it can be hard planning ahead without a full overview of the belt layout.

● David Upchurch



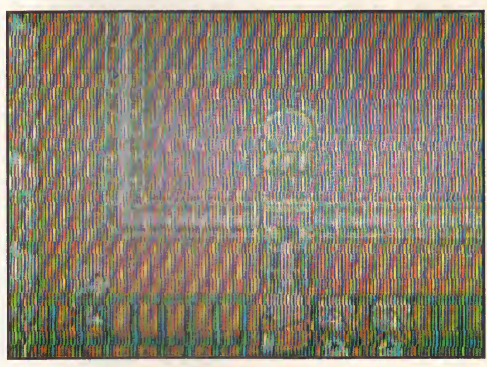
Strangely cute graphics.
Well-judged difficulty.
Unique and addictive gameplay.

Inability to see whole game area is annoying.

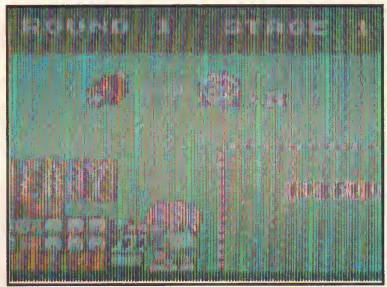
What a title, eh? Certainly gets the adrenalin rushing, doesn't it? What's next? Bus Shelter Frenzy? Supermarket Nuts? Actually, this rather uninspiring title is a bit unfortunate, because it may put Joe Public off what is actually a right smart little arcade puzzle game.

As the name suggests, the game takes place in a factory warehouse. Each room of the warehouse is made up of a network of conveyor belts. The player's job is to convey various essentials (loaves of bread, kebabs, Game Gears) that appear at the top of the screen to a queue of waiting customers at the bottom. The player does this by guiding his on-screen character onto switches which re-route the goodies onto different belts.

This essentially simple task is, of course, made harder by the manic security guards trying to stop you, and the fact that some of the items



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FACTORY PANIC RATINGS

PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE



There's a very strange intro, with the hero running past a line of grey-clad people who look like they're queuing for bread in Russia. Not exactly the jolliest start to a cutesy puzzle game. The gameplay is enjoyable but seems a little simplistic at first - but then things start hotting up and the game really gets its claws into you. If you like your arcade puzzle games with more emphasis on the arcade than the puzzle then you should find this brilliant entertainment, and anyone else should find it pretty good fun too.

7 6 8 9
G IQ A FF

RATING 859

GAMEGEAR RATING

WOODY POP

addictive powers will soon have you burning several gallons of midnight oil. The only big drawback for the novice is the fact that the action hots up a bit too quickly - if your reactions are less than lightning fast, you may get very annoyed very quickly.

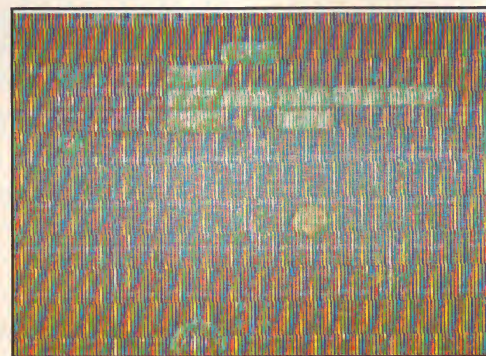
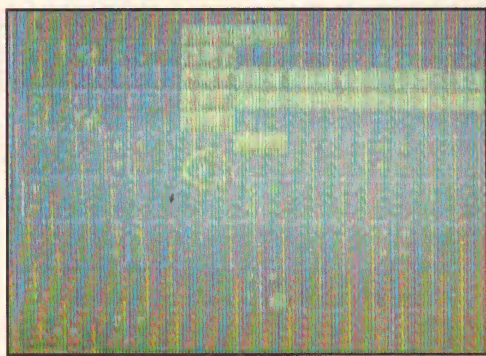
● David Upchurch



Reading the scenario for Woody Pop you'd be forgiven for thinking that you're about to play some sort of cutesy platform game. It describes the antics of Woody Pop, an ickle wooden toy, who has to explore the fifty rooms of the big toy shop that has been over-run by all manner of nasty puppets, tin soldiers and clockwork robots. As it turns out, this is actually an Arkanoid clone, and a good one at that.

And for those who have been locked in a dark room by their evil stepmother for the last ten years, by that I mean that this is Breakout with big brassy knobs on. So now we have some bricks that are indestructible, some that require more than one hit to be destroyed and some that drop a power-up when hit, such as lasers, double ball, large bat, etc.

To those that haven't seen this type of game before, it may sound like a classic candidate for the 'nice simple idea spoiled by too much tarding up' school of games, but it actually works very well and its



Easy to get into.
Hugely addictive.

Gets very tough.
Overly-strange storyline.

PRICE
£24.99

WOODY POP RATINGS

PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE



These games practically define the term 'easy to get into' - after all, what could be easier to comprehend than knocking a ball back and forth with a bat? Great fun, but even on beginner level the difficulty starts building up very quickly, and lightning reactions are needed to survive before you've got even a third of the way into the game. Although the shine wears off after a month or so, you'll probably find yourself strangely drawn back long into the future. Weird, huh?

7 6 8 9
G IQ A FF

RATING 896

GAMEGEAR RATING

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**next
month**

next!

Boo! As this issue draws to an end, and we approach the moment when the final credits will slowly roll up the screen, it's true to say that most of the plot development for this particular thriller is done. But you'd be foolish if you're the sort of person who gets up and puts on their coat when you reckon the final twist has been revealed. It's always the smart people who stick it out until the very end.

Indeed, no sooner has our rollicking team of software special agents completed this month's series of dangerous exclusive-gathering assignments, than they're off again, preparing an even more explosive and thrill-packed script for next month's New Year special.

So all the half-wits who have already left to catch the last tube home won't be finding out about the host of exciting features in our next presentation.

Most significantly there will be the ACE Awards, a glittering occasion celebrating the very best software releases of 1991.

And of course, aside from all the tip-top secret things which we can't talk about, there will be the usual supporting cast of exclusive reviews, In the Works, Previews and Tricks'n'Tactics so vital for a well balanced software picture.

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new releases

What's this? Colour screenshots on a Pink Page? Whatever next? You may well be amazed, dear reader, because this month our aim to satisfy your thirst for information has led to this infernal invention; an entire page of pictures of every new game reviewed in the Directory. Well, all apart from the ones we forgot to photograph, that is.

reviews directory

h dear. Another issue so very nearly over. Well, you should be ashamed of yourselves for thinking such a thing, because this is where the magazine really **BEGINS!** Well, alright, that isn't strictly the case, but the following thirty pages of hard reviews information should successfully both inform you and help deal with all those WH Smith gift tokens which you'll have received. And quite aside from all that, it's a right good read.

Every game we come across from the finest simulation to the crappiest arcade adventure will eventually turn up in the Directory, so you're never in any doubt about any of the games that you're likely to find in your local computer store.

We hope you enjoy using this buyers guide just as much as we enjoyed putting it together for you.

Oh, while we've got a spare few column inches, we should perhaps give a brief breakdown of the reviews criteria employed in the Directory. As you will have noticed, the games don't receive our usual score out of 1,000. Instead they get a five star rating indicating their quality. This, again, is simply intended to make your browsing activities as painless as possible.

Just in case you were in any doubt, the higher number of stars a game receives, the better we think it is. Don't laugh. You'd be surprised the number of people who can't grasp the simplest system.

So, for the record, here's the breakdown:

☆☆☆☆☆	Excellent. Buy without hesitation.
☆☆☆☆	Pretty smart. A safe bet.
☆☆☆	Acceptable, but certainly no world beater.
☆☆	Not very good at all.
☆	Rubbish.

And let that be an end of it. So, without further ado, let the big pink carpet unfurl and the Directory begin!

New Releases:

A320 Airbus
Action Pack
Aero Star
Battle Isle
Breach 2
Bugs Bunny
Castlevania IV
Devil Crash
Devious Designs
Double Dragon 3
Fighter Command
Final Blow

Fuzzball
Winter Challenge
Mad TV
Mercs
Outrun
Pegasus
Robozone
Rugby World Cup
Solitaire Poker
Strike Fleet
Under Pressure
World Class Rugby

Still Available:

Alien Breed
Armouredgeddon
Atomino
Baby Jo
Burger Time Deluxe
Captain Planet
Castelian
Celtic Legends
Centurion - Defender of Rome
Choplifter 2
Civilization
Crime Time
Cruise for a Corpse
Death Bringer
Deuteros
EA Hockey
Elf
F-15 Strike Eagle II
Face Off
Fatal Rewind
Final Fight
Flicky
Floor 13
Football Director 2
Formula One GP
Gunship 2000
Hard Nova
Heimdall
Hudson Hawk
Hunter
Immortal
Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker

Last Ninja 3
Leisure Suit Larry 5 Lotus Turbo 2
Magic Garden
Martian Memorandum
Megafortress
Mega lo Mania
Megatraveller 2
Megatwins
MiG-29M
Might and Magic 3
Monster Business
Nebulus 2
Outrun Europa
Pitfighter
Railroad Tycoon
Rise of the Dragon
Robin Hood
Robocod
Robocop 3
Rodland
Sarakon
Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe
Seven Colours
Silent Service II
Smash TV
Thunderhawk
Utopia
Volfied
Vroom
Willy Beamish
Wing Commander II

releases

A320 AIRBUS



Price Amiga £25.99
Genre Simulation
Publisher Thalion

You what? Alright, it's not as if we have any problem flying high in an F-16 or blowing up radar installations in a state-of-the-art stealthfighter - but the A320 Airbus? Is somebody pulling our pilsner? Well, apparently not, as this is one of the biggest releases from German software house Thalion in quite a while. Rather akin to a computerised Jim'll Fix It, the game allows the player to be an airline pilot for a day - well, for however long he likes, really - at the controls of the little-known A320 jetliner.

As anybody who knows anything about aviation at all will expect, A320 Airbus is no simple game. Passenger jets are impossibly more complicated than the fighter planes that have mainly been the subject of simulations in the past. Thalion's game has attempted to simulate the spaghetti-like complexity as accurately as possible - and for the most part it succeeds, although this hyper-realistic approach is unlikely to appeal to the majority of flight-sim gamers. All those knobs, dials and readouts may be a bit too much for the average Joe Shmoe.

A320 Airbus isn't just about flying about a bit, though. Oooh, no. Players get to create their own pilots, take part in training or active duty, work out flight plans and generally make their way up the ladder of commercial aviation. For those that find this sort of

thing appealing, there's no doubt that A320 Airbus is actually very good indeed. It's professionally-produced, apart from the occasionally ropery graphics, and though it's not exactly immediate or instinctive, the rewards are there to be had for players willing to plough the manual and learn all the ins and outs. The only problem is, I can't quite imagine who's going to be that interested, when you think about all the other, considerably more action-orientated, flight games on the market today. It's just horses for courses, I suppose.

☆☆☆☆

ACTION PACK



Price Atari ST/Amiga £24.99
Genre Compilation
Publisher Action 16

Wot a bargain! Ten games - *Colorado*, *Cosmic Pirate*, *Eliminator*, *Fast Lane*, *Hostages*, *Maya*, *On Safari*, *Rotor*, *Sherman M4*, *Targhan* - for twenty-five quid! Okay, we'll be honest and admit that they're all getting a bit long in the tooth now, and more than a couple of the games on offer here are real Xmas turkey material (*On Safari*, in particular, should be plucked, stuffed with Paxo and bunged in the oven for a good five hours as soon as possible).

However, *Cosmic Pirate* (a supah brill multiway scrolling shoot-'em-up), *Eliminator* (a 3D shoot-'em-up cum driving game) and *Hostages* (a multi-part arcade adventure) more than compensate, and would make a superb

value compilation on their own. The other games are poor to middling in quality, but for the price you really can't complain. Highly recommended.

☆☆☆☆

AEROSTAR



Price GameBoy £24.99 (Import)
Genre Arcade Blast
Publisher Vic Tokai

What do you get if you cross a platform game with a vertically-scrolling shoot-'em-up? A bit of a bloody mess, that's what. Aerostar is a seven-stage blaster where the player has to guide a spaceship along an enemy-held highway. The player can fly into the air for a very limited time to avoid ground fire and hop over gaps in the road, but this makes him vulnerable to attacks from the air. And, of course, there's a plethora of juicy power-ups to be collected along the way that turn the player's craft from something only a little more threatening than a slap in the face into the starship world's equivalent of the 'King of the Beach'.

The idea of combining blasting and bouncing is theoretically good, but unfortunately in practice it doesn't work so well. The player 'jumps' by holding down one of the GameBoy buttons, and the longer the button is held down the longer the jump. Thing is, the GameBoy's design makes it difficult to fire at the same time without taking one finger of the jump button, resulting in the ship plummeting into an abyss. And as the road starts nar-

rowing, and the need for jumping becomes more frequent and the enemy's attacks become more vicious, this becomes particularly annoying.

As it stands, Aerostar is a nice stab at something a bit different, only marred by the slightly clumsy implementation. Worth a look, though, if you're interested by the sound of it.

☆☆☆

BATTLE ISLE



Price Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £25.99
Genre Strategy
Publisher Ubi Soft

As strategy games get trendier and more diverse, with the likes of *Populous*, *Mega lo Mania* and *Sim City*, the latest from French firm Ubi Soft represents something quite different, which we hardly see any more these days - a wargame in the classic vein. It's set on a far-off world where two armies do battle for control of a series of islands. It's vaguely similar to the old SSI wargames - units move in turns across a battlefield broken down into hexagonal zones. More experienced gamers will know the sort of thing.

Due to the space-age scenario, the units involved consist of all manner of high-tech tanks, planes, ships and armoured vehicles as well as more conventional infantry battalions. Players move their units about, creating tactical formations and assaults, with the inevitable confrontations between opposing forces. As the battle goes on, units must be resupplied, tactics altered and all the other guff that goes along with a game of this type.

Battle Isle's most favourable option is the two-player mode - something that's woefully missing from a lot of strategy products these days. A handy split-screen display allows two mates to play head-to-head - although this does mean you can see what your opponent is up to at any time, of course.

Battle Isle is undoubtedly a fine and very 'deep' strategy game, and one that should appeal to anyone who likes the good old-fashioned ways of doing things, without all the interfering bells and whistles. But despite the game's accessibility, many younger players on the lookout for a brain game are more likely to steer towards the likes of *Populous II*. Good stuff, though.

☆☆☆☆

BREACH 2



Price Amiga £25.99

Genre Strategy

Publisher Impressions

Though there's nothing particularly special on offer for die-hard RPG fans this month, the follow-up to the highly-successful Breach is worthy of their attention. Set in the future with the player in command of a team of space marines, it's more strategy than role-playing, but the mix of the two genres is an appealing one. Probably the best comparison is with that old favourite *Laser Squad* - Breach 2, however, boasts a considerably more sophisticated approach, with a smart isometric viewpoint, much easier command control and more involving missions.

In each mission scenario, the player leads his team through enemy territory, exploring rooms, collecting objects and doing battle with the alien hordes they encounter. In the classic RPG tradition, characters can be toolled up with a huge array of weapons and equipment, including rifles, rocket launchers and bombs, and all the characters come complete with individual

attributes and abilities.

An added boon is that, should the player get bored with the multitude of missions available, they can create and edit their own. How many gamers will want to expend this amount of effort (designing a playable mission on any kind of game is no easy task) remains to be seen, however, and you may want to ask yourself if you're ever likely to make use of the feature. But there are enough predesigned missions to make Breach 2 worthwhile even without the editor, and on that score the game should at least be on the 'take a look' list for all RPG/strategy aficionados, if not a definite purchase.

☆☆☆

BUGS BUNNY CRAZY CASTLE 2



Price Gameboy £24.99 (Import)

Genre Puzzle

Publisher Kemco-Seika

Who the Hell is Honey Bunny™? I must be getting old, because I don't remember Bugs™ ever having a soppy girlfriend. It sounds to me like a lame excuse to rehash the old 'girl kidnapped

by witch who must be rescued by hero' scenario to me. In this case it's the hideously ugly Witch Hazel™ who's the wrong doer (now her I do remember), and who has whisked Honey™ away to her castle. Bugs™ must rescue her by hunting through 28 huge rooms of platforms, pipes, ladders and Looney Tunes™ characters. Bugs™ must find the hidden keys in each to unlock the door to the next room. By picking up bombs, axes and so on Bugs™ can blow up those darn Toons, hack his way through blocked passages, etc, etc.

Although it looks like a platform game, Crazy Castle 2™ actually plays more like a puzzle game. Success is down to using the items you pick up along the way to get past certain obstacles at the correct place and time. And this part of the game is quite fun.

It's the platformy element that ruins the game - Bugs™ moves in big chunks and is hard to control, and all too infuriatingly often you lose a life by bumping into the baddies by accident. Despite it's good graphics, in my opinion Crazy Castles 2™ is a right stinking load of old Crap™.

☆☆

CASTLEVANIA IV



Price Super Famicom £49.99 (Import)

Genre Arcade Blast

Publisher Konami

I couldn't believe it when I loaded this up! Imagine it's Christmas (not that difficult really). You're really looking forward to getting a certain present, and you've laid the ground with lots of heavy hints to your parents. Then, on Christmas morning, you get a wrapped gift that looks the same size and shape as the the thing you want. Trouble is, when you open it up there's something totally different inside. Oh, it's a nice enough present all right, just not the one you wanted. Well, that's Castlevania IV. It was great on the NES, brilliant on the Gameboy and, along with CapCom's *Super Ghouls n' Ghosts*, was one on the big anticipated releases on the Super Famicom.

To be fair, Castlevania's a decent enough game - there's lots of running around platforms, ladders and what have you, lots of wopping the bad guys with a giant mace. Unfortunately, what there isn't lots of is fun. The graphics are garish, and the animation is merely perfunctory, with the hero having a

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rather unfortunate shuffling walk that makes him look as if he's got rags tied to his feet and he's trying to polish the floor. If this had appeared before *SGn'G* then it might have received a better reception. As it happens, it didn't, so it hasn't.
☆☆☆

DEVIL CRASH



Price Megadrive £39.99 (Import)

Genre Arcade Blast

Publisher Tecno Soft

Computerised pinball has never been a particularly popular genre - and a quick glance at Devil Crash is enough to make you see why. Ever since the age-old days of *Slamball* and *Time Scanner*, coin-ops and home machines have tried to emulate that seedy tilt-n'-slam pinball feel, but with little success. In theory, it should work excellently, with the binary format allowing for all sorts of tricks and wizardry that wouldn't be possible on a real machine. Unfortunately, no amount of gimmicks can make up for the fact that pinball on a computer screen just doesn't compare to the exhilaration of a real table.

To its credit, Devil Crash actually does a better job than most, with credible ball inertia and plenty of interesting features - the table is some three screens long and packed with all manner of secret rooms, bonuses and other bits. Unfortunately the gothic nature of the graphics (pentangles and mystic runes aplenty) lend a rather depressing and messy feel to the game itself, and as a result it's difficult to really enjoy. Devil Crash is the aesthetic equivalent of a bad headache. Whatever its shortcomings, however, computer pinball has acquired a respectable cult following for itself, and gamers of that persuasion will no doubt find Devil Crash to be one of the more impressive examples of the genre. For the rest of us, however, there are more enjoyable - and less frustrating - bits of plastic on the market.
☆☆☆

DEVIOUS DESIGNS



Price Amiga £25.99

Genre Puzzle

Publisher Image Works

Hmmm, not so much devious as simply fiddly. Ever since the world went *Tetris* mad, there's been a steady trickle of arcade puzzlers trying to tap into that elusive addictive ingredient that made Alexey Pajitnov's classic such a wallet-filling money spinner. Devious Designs had more potential than most, but it hasn't quite been realised.

The basic idea is simple enough. The player guides a tiny figure around various landscapes, picking up variously-shaped blocks and trying to slot them onto a transparent template, whilst collecting bonuses, a myriad of power ups and avoiding or shooting the swirling bad guys. All well and good. Ah, but there's more to it than that. On the later levels, the player can make his character walk up the walls and even on the ceiling. And this is where it all starts to fall apart.

Control over the player's character is generally fine, but when near a wall it's all too easy to find yourself clambering up when you didn't want to and not clambering up when you did. Admittedly, given a fair deal of practice the player should be able to compensate for this fiddliness, but in the short-term it mars an otherwise enjoyable and reasonably addictive addition to the genre.
☆☆☆

DOUBLE DRAGON 3



Price Amiga £25.99

Genre Beat-'Em-Up

Publisher Storm

Double Dragon fans have been more than short-changed in the past by the conversions of the previous two Double Dragon coin ops, so it comes as some relief to be able to say that this - the third instalment of the on-going fisticuff escapades of Jimmy and Billy Lee - is, despite a couple of reservations, pretty much what devotees have been waiting for.

The plot is confused to say the least. According to who you listen to, it's either the usual girly rescue mission, or a quest for treasure, or a fight against the 'Ultimate Evil'. No matter - the mechanics remain the same. Jimmy and Billy Lee (a.k.a. players one and two) have to fump and crump their way through fourteen levels of action set in five exotic locations (and as the game progresses you'll discover 'exotic' is an understatement).

Players start the game with fifteen

'coins', and in the shops found en route the player can buy extra lives, weapons, power ups and even some fancy new fighting moves. It's a shame you can't just find weapons along the way, but this coins business does at least add a game-enhancing strategy element, because the player has to decide how best to spend his cash.

While some may find the gameplay dated and repetitive (a complaint, to be fair, that could be made about most games of this type), those eponymous 'fans of the genre' should be revelling in one of the more exciting and certainly the slickest slices of beat-'em-up action around. And, for my money, it's far better than *Final Fight*.
☆☆☆☆

FIGHTER COMMAND



Price Amiga £25.99

Genre Strategy

Publisher Impressions

It may be a little late to cash in on Operation Desert Storm, but there can be no doubting Fighter Command's topicality. Set in the present day Middle East, it puts the player in the shiny shoes of an allied air commander who's been given a simple task - kick the stuffing out of the aggressive enemy as quickly and violently as possible. But despite the pretty picture of a jet pilot coming into land on the box, there's not actually any flight-sim type action in the game at all. It's 100% pure strategy, with the player making all his decisions from a series of control rooms, screens and offices. Everything is presented by simplistic overhead camera views, tactical screens and radar displays.

Everything you'd expect from a military strategy game is in there - you sweep the area with reconnaissance satellites to find out where everything is, then organise and launch attacks against chosen targets. There's a wide range of kit available, including stealth bombers, fighters and helicopters from various air forces along with exocet, patriot and scud missiles. As the game progresses, the player has to keep tabs on political developments, fuel and equipment resources and all kinds of other factors which govern the game world.

Actually, considering there's rarely anything really exciting going on on-screen, Fighter Command does quite a good job of holding the player's atten-

tion. Most of the screens are static, nothing's really very immediate and it takes time to learn the basics, but despite all this it's still strangely compelling. There's plenty to do, lots of strategy to get the head round and generally it's all very jolly. The lack of any real flight action is a major setback, and it's because of this that many gamers may prefer to wait for Microprose's forthcoming ATAC, In The Works'd this month.
☆☆☆

FINAL BLOW



Price Amiga £25.99

Genre Arcade Blast

Publisher Storm

I actually went to a boxing match a couple of months back and people in the crowd were genuinely shouting "Hit him!" as if it was some sort of useful tactic which their chosen fighter should employ. One suspects those are exactly the sort of folks who spend more than a couple of quid on Final Blow in the arcades. Nothing wrong with the celebration of the noble art, and nothing wrong with having a right old clanging session in the process, but Final Blow has more to do with seeing who can hit Fire the fastest than boxing.

Although the players are endowed with plenty of moves and the ability to block punches, the speed of the game completely removes any sort of finesse which, after all, is what boxing is all about. Even Mike Tyson would concentrate on different areas of the body. Hit them in the ribs enough to make them lower their guard, and then go to work on their face. No such accuracy in Final Blow, since the flurry of computerised and human arms makes it impossible to see who's arms are who's. The result is a non-stop battle of stick-slammings frustration. About the only way to work out who's being hit is by watching the energy bar at the bottom of the screen.

So far as a coin-op conversion goes, it's a pretty good job, and in two-player mode it's alright for a laugh, but the original was far from perfect. Amiga owners may be wise to hold on for a more rounded game.
☆☆☆

FUZZBALL



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Price Amiga £19.99

Genre Platform

Publisher System 3

Well, this is a bit of class from the past and no mistake. Refreshingly free from pretension, System 3's latest is a simple yet hugely addictive platform affair. The player controls a bouncing ball of fluff that has to be guided around a network of platforms, collecting fruity bonuses. Enemy sprites, the Fuzzballs of the title, try to stop him. These come in four increasingly-aggressive 'flavours': green, purple, black and red. By repeatedly shooting them with his blob gun, the player can stun them long enough to knock them off the platform. However, if the player takes too long the Fuzzball comes to but even nastier than before.

As the player progresses through the fifty-odd levels more and badder Fuzzballs appear, unkillable monsters start bouncing around and the platform leaps provide an even greater test of the player's pixel-perfect positioning powers. Fuzzball is a classic example of 'simple being good'. The addictive, uncluttered gameplay and cute graphics make this an A-grade winner. And there's a right dreamy animated intro to boot. (Well, you've got to fill those big boxes with something, haven't you?)

☆☆☆☆☆

THE GAMES - WINTER CHALLENGE



Price IBM PC £29.99

Genre Sport Simulation

Publisher Accolade

This is, as our rad friends would say, mega-wicked! It appeared in the post, totally unexpected, and turns out to be one of the best games we've seen this month! Yeah, seriously! The player (or players - up to ten can take part) compete in eight winter sports - luge, downhill skating, cross-country skating, speed skating, bobsled, giant slalom, biathlon and ski jump. All the events are depicted in an effective mix of 3D polygons for the landscape (a bit like *Midwinter*) with sprites for the competitors and course scenery (trees, fences, etc). Sound is less impressive - on a basic PC the game is played almost in silence except for a between-game tune and a crowd cheer when a

player completes an event.

The player views the action from just behind and above his on-screen alter-ego, therefore getting a good view of the action as well as an excellent first-person impression of speed. Each of the events is relatively easy to control and consequently very easy to get into. Like the Epyx 'Games' series, success is dependent on timing and control rather than hammering the fire button, so it's very satisfying to play and makes shaving seconds off those best times more a matter of skill as opposed to physical stamina.

Despite its superior qualities, The Games may get a bit dull when played alone (a criticism levelled at nearly every game of this type). However, as a game to play with a group of friends it's near flawless - and that makes The Games a more than worthy purchase to play over this Xmas holiday period.

☆☆☆☆☆

MAD TV



Price IBM PC £29.99

Genre Strategy

Publisher Rainbow Arts

My, what timing! Only weeks after the big TV franchise debacle and as the country quakes in dread at the threat of a load of old Spanish comedies and crappy game shows filling our screens, Rainbow Arts produce a game which is all about running your own TV station! If only the geezers at TV-AM had the chance to play Mad TV, they might still be in business.

Not only is Mad TV a right laugh, allowing the player to have total control (with the only limiting factor being the budget) over an entire TV station, but it's an excellent strategy game into the bargain.

The aim is to keep Mad TV at the top of the TV ratings while simultaneously winning the heart of Betty, the most beautiful woman in town. Taking place in a huge skyscraper, the game has the player's character haring around from the various offices, buying up films, scheduling programs and keeping an eye on the all important viewing figures.

Every now and again, your boss will crop up and give you some helpful pointers. He may be keen that his station win an award for poncey art films, so it's up to you to schedule accordingly. Now all of this would be a good enough hoot on it's own, but when you

consider that Mad TV is a pretty excellent strategy game with complicated interrelations between various departments and some top notch presentation to boot, you would have to conclude that you'd be mad, ha-bleeding-ha, to miss it.

☆☆☆☆☆

MERCS



Price Megadrive £39.99 (Import)

Genre Arcade Blast

Publisher Sega

As if Megadrive owners hadn't had quite enough shoot-it-out blasts to keep them happy well into the next century, here's another chance to hammer the joypad. The player must team up with a bullet-headed mate and raid increasingly well defended enemy installations in your mission to rescue the President. Even the smooth top-down multi-directional scrolling and plentiful power-ups fail to elevate MerCs above the rank and file of shoot-'em-ups. Solo play is available for soldiers of fortune who prefer to go-it-alone (or who haven't got any friends) but the thrill factor of such missions is really pretty limited.

Equipped with initially weedy weapons, the over-muscled heroes must gradually work their way up the screen, picking off rebel soldiers both on foot or lurking in gun towers or jeeps. Extra firepower and strength replenishers can be had by destroying the numerous crates lying about.

Players can speed their progress through the frequently tiresome levels by jumping into a semi-burned out jeep and roaring up the screen. This bit is quite amusing, as you can run down the enemy soldiers or blast them with the jeep's in-built bazooka.

As well as the requisite end-of-level guardians (which here take the form of an assortment of military hardware - planes, helicopters, tanks, etc) the levels are reasonably well broken up with bigger foes in the shape of guntowers, machine gun nests and the like.

Aside from the problems thrown up when a game controlled by the joypad necessitates diagonal firing (the enemy troops always seem to attack on a diagonal) MerCs has a brace of other inadequacies up its sleeve. It looks poor, offers absolutely no originality and when played solo is a crushing bore.

☆☆☆

OUTRUN



Price Game Gear £24.99

Genre Racing Game

Publisher Sega

It may be an oldy but it certainly isn't a goldy - at least, not in its Gear incarnation it isn't. Out Run is arcade racing action stripped down to its basics - the player has to drive a red Ferrari through four stages, avoiding other traffic and those pesky stationary roadside obstacles. It's all against the clock, with the player being awarded precious extra seconds every time he completes one of the stages. And... er... that's just about it.

The impression of speed (achieved using good ol' colour banding) is fine, although the objects grow in an annoyingly coarse and chunky fashion. Unfortunately the number of roadsign objects is small, and the number of cars on the road even smaller - even on the hardest stage I only counted two other vehicles on the road at tops. Very poor. Worst of all it's ridiculously easy - I completed the game on my third go. Yes, really! The only real mark in the game's favour is the ability to play head-to-head with another Gear owner, but even then the thrills are few and far between. Not good.

☆☆☆

PEGASUS



Price Atari ST/Amiga £25.99

Genre Arcade Blast

Publisher Gremlin Graphics

Oh deary deary dear. What a shame that just when Gremlin starts getting a good reputation for itself with its classy product of late, it turns out a piece of tripe like this. Based very loosely on the classic Greek myth, Pegasus is a weird half-and-half mix of *R-Type* style shoot-'em-up action and run-along-and-chop-up-the-baddies platform stuff. This mixture of airborne and ground-based action is supposed to give the player variety and keep him interest. In practice all it does it get very boring very quickly.

In the shoot-'em-up section, Perseus (or Percius, as the box incorrectly spells his name) flies along on the back of the mythical winged horse, which is animated in an atrociously unconvincing manner, and blasts away at



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the attacking gargoyles, demons, harpies, etc. When he's survived this onslaught, Pegasus lands, Perseus dismounts and the ground section begins. This happens 50 times (25 air sections, 25 on the ground), by which time the player has probably torn all his hair out, kicked in the TV screen and lobbed his computer out of the window.

It's not that Pegasus is a bad idea - it's just that it's been executed in a such a God-awful lazy and unimaginative manner. The action in the horsey bits is sluggish and annoying, while the ground levels lack any of the finesse of, say, *Switchblade II*. The fact that there's lots of it doesn't make it any more of a viable purchase - unless you're a masochist of course. Complete with all manner of intolerable spelling mistakes within the game ("existence" instead of "existence", "new" instead of "knew"), Pegasus would have only just made the grade two years ago, or on public domain today. To ask £26 quid for it when it falls so horribly below today's standards of graphics and gameplay is a bit on an insult. Avoid.

☆☆

ROBOZONE



Price Amiga £25.99
Genre Arcade Blast
Publisher Image Works

Trying to hop onto the Green bandwagon (and missing by about six months), Imagework's latest and certainly not greatest puts the player in the driving seat of a giant two-legged war machine, a sort of cut-price version of the one in Psygnosis' *Killing Game Show*, with a mission to put an end to pollution. Hoorah!

Fundamentally Robozone's a simple blast-anything-that-moves affair, with the programmers trying to maintain player interest by constantly changing the play style. One level's a side-viewed multidirectional-scrolling explore-n'-shoot, the second's much the same but in 3D and the third's a horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up. While each is programmed well enough, there's precious little fun or excitement to be found in any of them.

The really annoying thing about Robozone is it's pretense to being 'Green' - the manual is littered with Top Tips about how to help save the environment. One states pompously: "If you have a choice, avoid buying packaged goods." Considering that

Robozone comes in a giant box with a single disc and a thin manual rattling about inside, the irony of this statement beggars belief. Probably the best tip is the first one: "Try not to waste energy." Imageworks, having played this I already have.

☆☆

RUGBY - THE WORLD CUP



Price Atari ST/Amiga £24.99
Genre Sports Arcade
Publisher Domark

Hey! It's *Scrum Off!* Well, not quite, but it is a pretty blatant attempt by the Doms to adapt Anco's footy classic style to the rough n' tumble, if you will, 'world' of rugby. Of course, as any fule kno, rugby and football are very different sports, with the former lacking the non-stop speed of the latter. Not, then, perhaps the best game to try to shrink to fit into *Kick Off*'s hard and fast playing style.

However, as it 'appens, it all works pretty well. Sure, the action is a bit stop and start, but there is a definite flow to the game and few lapses in pace. The game is viewed in plan view, with the pitch scrolling to follow the player's... er... player (who is, natch, the one nearest the ball). Throws and kicks are controlled simply by the joystick, and it lacks the subtlety of *Kick Off* (no aftertouch here). Scrums are a case of frantically waggling the joystick to force the opposition back, and this is fine - unless you're playing the All Blacks, in which case you need to waggle a sub-light speeds to beat them.

In fact, that's probably the biggest criticism - the top teams are too tough. There are other minor niggles, such as the way player sprites overlap on top of each other and the way that the other members of the team don't put themselves in good positions to pass, meaning that play often revolves one-man rushes from mid-way down the pitch to the try line. But while Rugby may not be perfect, it's still a pretty good 'try'. (Cue sound of reviewer being shot.)

☆☆☆☆

SOLITAIRE POKER



Price Game Gear £29.99 (Import)

Genre Puzzle
Publisher Sega

Everyone loves a good puzzle game, and this is a very good one. The aim is simple - select a card from one of the four piles on offer, and place it on a 5 x 5 grid. Points are awarded for pairs, flushes, etc, created either vertically, horizontally or along the main diagonals. Score over a certain amount and the player progresses on to the next, tougher level. There are a number of variants on the theme, but that's the main thrust of the game.

What more is there to say about such a simple concept? Aesthetically it's fine - the functional graphics are clear and colourful and there's a vast number of background tunettes to pick between. Although not exactly using the full-colour LCD capabilities of the Gear to it's fullest, it's one of the most enjoyable Gear games I've seen for a long, long time, and as such comes with a strong recommendation.

☆☆☆☆☆

STRIKE FLEET



Price Atari ST/Amiga £25.99
Genre Strategy
Publisher Electronic Arts

Strike Fleet doesn't look the most inspiring game from the shots on the back of the box, but the Lucasfilm credit hints that this may be better than it appears. As, in fact, it is. The game is a sea-based strategy game split into fourteen individual missions or a more-taxing eight-mission campaign. After each mission briefing, the player is allocated a number of points (depending on the difficulty of the mission) to 'spend' in the shipyard. Each ship 'costs' a certain number of points depending on its class, so the player must be careful in picking a balanced fleet.

Once at sea, the player can flick between the ships at will. Control is relatively simplistic (thankfully), allowing the player to steer, change speed, activate radar and sonar and, of course, fire the variety of on-board weapons. In addition, certain ships carry a complement of helicopter that can be sent on reces or sub-hunting forays.

Despite it's initially drab appearance, Strike Fleet actually turns out to be quite involving. There's a great deal of satisfaction to be had from successfully controlling the fleet, and seeing off the air, sea or underwater attacks provides frequent doses of adrenalin.

Admittedly, those without a strategic leaning are unlikely to be converted by the game's charms, but if Strike Fleet sounds at least slightly appealing give it a go. I think you'll be surprised.

☆☆☆☆

UNDER PRESSURE



Price Amiga £25.99
Genre Arcade Blast
Publisher Electronic Zoo

Oops. Funny how one minute you're on top of the world and the next you're, erm, not. A situation which top notch programmers Eldritch the Cat have found themselves in with their latest release, Under Pressure. Their last and indeed only release, *Projectyle* was exceedingly well received, being a pretty excellent sports sim, but Heaven only knows what gremlins and glitches are to blame for this disaster.

Styled in an uncomfortably similar fashion to Psygnosis games (the in-between level text is virtually identical to Psygy's game name text and the robot which the player controls looks exceedingly like the creature on the *Shadow of the Beast* box), Under Pressure falls down in almost every single respect.

Guiding a huge robotic killing machine through a bunch of decaying cityscapes, the player must duel with a myriad of different monsters - mainly snakes - with the impressive arsenal of weaponry available from his cockpit.

Sounds alright, doesn't it? Alas, from here on in, the game falls down rather badly. For a start, everything is far too big. The player's robot almost fills the screen, but doesn't have the detail or animation finesse to support its size. Also, the scale presents a problem in that since only one horizontal level of the city is ever visible on the screen, the game feels more like a duck shoot than an exciting adventure. Absolutely no aiming is necessary for shooting for the monsters either, as they just sit up and swallow the player's fire. Oh dear.

☆

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Price Atari ST/Amiga £25.99

Genre Sports Simulation

Publisher Audiogenic

Another Rugby game!? With 'Swing Low Sweet Chariot' still ringing in our ears, it's no surprise that both Audiogenic and Domark have decided this as a suitable time to release their rugby games. However, whereas the Doms have gone for out and out playability with few bells and whistles for their game, 'Genic have opted for a more rigorous approach to the sport, offering plenty of accuracy and a great deal of scope for subtle play. And as such, it's somewhat more satisfying to play, if a bit harder to get into.

It's also a lot prettier, with play viewed from a 3D angle (à la *John Madden's Football* on the Megadrive) and all the players animate nicely if a little stiffly. If this doesn't appeal, there's a selection of other views on offer, including a no-nonsense top-down view for the more traditionally minded. There's also a comprehensive Video Replay function, whereby favourite bits of the game can be saved to disc and watched again and again.

World Class Rugby may not have Domark *Rugby's* pick-up-and-play instant appeal, but it's a good bet that of the two this will be the one you'll still be loading up in a year's time.

☆☆☆☆

SPECIAL ENTRY!

RICK DANGEROUS

Price Amiga £7.99

Genre Platform

Publisher Kixx

Phew! Just squeaking into the reviews directory at the very last second comes everyone's favourite hero, Rick Dangerous. Here, in his first outing (which originally came out on the Micro Style label) Rick must explore a mysterious land very much in the Indiana Jones vein, dodging deadly traps and doing away with evil little pygmys.

Although many games have tried, few have surpassed the fun and excitement which Rick delivers. The graphic style is pretty unique, too, with all the characters being short and squat and full of humour.

And quite aside from all that, the escalation of the puzzles and the learning curve which effectively drags the player through the game, instructing and then challenging, make Rick Dangerous fantastically satisfying to play.

☆☆☆☆☆

oh my newsagent

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ALIEN BREED



Price Amiga £24.99
Genre Arcade Blast
Publisher Team 17

Alien Breed can best be described as the *Aliens* licence that should have been. It grafts *Aliens* atmosphere onto *Gauntlet*-esque gameplay to create an addictive - albeit unoriginal - winner. One or two players can take part simultaneously, and their job is to run around the six plan-viewed maze-like levels of a monster-infested space station, blasting seven shades of slime out of anything that crawls, slithers or lurks.

Fortunately the problem that always afflicted *Gauntlet* (i.e. though fun, there was no real aim to playing apart from scoring points) has been averted by giving the players a task to complete on each level (normally of the 'find a location and blow it up' nature). Okay, so it's not exactly lifting the game into Arcade Adventure territory, but it's provides enough of a goal to keep the player coming back for more.

The addictive gameplay is backed up by some super-slick scrolling and graphics (although the animation is a little perfunctory), and the term 'arcade-like' is very appropriate here. Throughout the use of sound to create atmosphere and tension is superb, especially when the station's self-destruct sequence is kicked in and the player has to find the exit before the place blows. The only real gripe is that given that the game is for 1Mb Amigas only, you can't help feeling that something slightly more

ambitious could have been attempted. But as it stands this is the best straightforward blast for months, and that's a good enough recommendation for anyone.

☆☆☆☆

ARMOURGEDDON



Price Atari ST/Amiga £25.99
Genre Simulation
Publisher Psygnosis

Psygnosis' latest 3D-polygon effort centres around a six-part mission to find the five pieces of a neutron bomb and use it to destroy an enemy HQ. There are six combat vehicles to try out, ranging from ground-hugging tanks and hovercraft to high-flying jets and helicopter and the player must use his 'skill and judgement' to decide when, where and how best to use them to achieve his current mission objectives.

Mouse control of each vehicle is smooth and responsive, with the fluid 3D giving a good pulse-quickenng feeling of speed.

The player can switch between the vehicles 'in the field' using the function keys (the computer puts the vehicle on auto when this happens, so there's no risk of a recently-vacated jet ploughing nose-first into the ground). Like Core's *Thunderhawk*, the accent is on action rather than simulation, with the enemy attacking almost as soon as the player pokes a metal-shielded nose out of his bunker, which makes for exciting is somewhat relentless

action. But it's not all shoot, shoot, shoot. There's an important management element as well, where the player has to wisely allocate scientists and technicians to develop new weapons and fresh vehicles to replace those blown to pieces by the very active enemy.

Armourgeddon is one of Psygnosis' best games to date, with solid gameplay backing up the impressive visuals. Armourgeddon sick of it? Not one bit.

☆☆☆☆

ATOMINO



Price Atari ST/Amiga £25.99
Genre Puzzle
Publisher Psygnosis

Hmmm, fascinating! There are few games based around atomic physics, and even fewer interesting ones, so a big "Huzzah!" and pat on the back for Psygnosis. Atomino is a puzzle game based around atomic valency, i.e. the number of bonds an atom can make with other atoms. Hydrogen, for example, can make one bond while Helium can make two.

The aim of the game is to place randomly-allocated atoms down on a grid and try to form molecules of various sizes. (i.e. at least three atoms big). A molecule is only complete when all the atoms within it have their bonds accounted for.

It all sounds a bit...well...dry, but in fact turns out to be great fun with its

addictive challenge, pretty graphics and rising tempo sound making it one of the better puzzle games on the market.

☆☆☆☆

BABY JO



Price Atari ST/Amiga £24.99
Genre Platform Game
Publisher Loriciels

Imagine Mirrorsoft's *Brat* in two dimensions and you've got a good idea of what the latest import from French firm Loriciels is all about. Or if you don't know *Brat*, try imagining *Mario* with a nappy-wearing baby as the main character. It's all really rather ludicrous, with the teeny toddler having to eat the bonus goodies as he bounces along the landscape in order to keep fit - but he mustn't eat too much, or he'll mess his nappy! I mean come on! What are these French games designers on? Something pretty strong if the quality of Baby Jo's aesthetics are anything to go by. Poorly designed sprites, atrocious music and hideously jerky backdrops are all proof of Baby Jo's naughtiness, but it has to be said that it is kind of cute in a rather perverse and definitely strange sort of way.

But if there's one thing it certainly isn't, it's fun - the slow, annoying gameplay and hastily thrown-together design makes sure of that. It's for precisely this reason that Baby Jo should only really be on the shopping list of platform freaks desperate for a new fix - and even then there are much more playable options available.

☆☆

BURGER TIME DELUXE



Price GameBoy £29.99 (Import)
Genre Platform
Publisher Data East

Now this is a real blast from the past, when arcade games didn't have to throw punters around like some sub-standard funfair ride just to get them to part with their cash. The player here has to guide tiny Pete the Chef around a network of platforms and ladders. In a bizarre culinary exercise Pete has to make giant hamburgers by walking over the various ingredients lying on the platforms, forcing them to fall down the screen onto the the platform below

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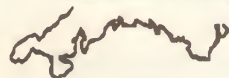
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and eventually onto a plate at the bottom. Once all the hamburgers have been made Pete advances onto the next, more complex arrangement of platforms.

Now this all sounds a bit easy, but you've reckoned without the mutant sausages, gherkins and fried eggs that have escaped from the cupboard and are wandering the platforms intent on Pete's demise. Fortunately the canny chef is armed with a pepper pot and a carefully-aimed shake will stun the baddies for a few moments allowing Pete to make good his escape. More finally, Pete can try to time his food-dropping antics to crush the ingenious ingredients. Burger Time Deluxe is a fun little game, although the graphics verge on the minuscule. It's probably a bit too simplistic for today's younger gamers, but nostalgia buffs will enjoy this tasty slice of the past.

☆☆☆

CAPTAIN PLANET



Price Atari ST/Amiga £25.99

Genre Arcade Action

Publisher Mindscape

Pass the lentils, man. Thanks. Yeah, like I was telling you there's like this guy, right, and he's like this sort of super-hero, you know. Goes around saving the world from these real heavy breadhead polluters. Yeah, like you say. Heavy shit, man. Anyway, he's got these five helpers, and they're like just kids, you know, but they've got this special rings that give them these cosmic powers. Totally amazing. Each level of the game like centres around one of these six characters, and they're just far out.

I mean like the first character, Ma-Ti, uses her ring to like chill out the bad guys and regrow plants so she can climb up to the level exit. Yeah, and like when she gets out there's this helicopter she has to fly around in and scoop up endangered elephants and take them to a sanctuary. Yeah, exactly. It's like this amazing mix of platform game and shoot-'em-up. Mmmm, yeah, the graphics are sort of cute, the scrolling's fine, and the tunes are neat, but control over your little sprite guy's a bit tricky. Yeah, Tricky Dicky. Watergate. All The President's Men. But you get used to it and all in all it's quite a far-out experience, if not the slickest thing like you've ever seen. Lots of really pretty psychedelic colours, too.

☆☆☆

112 AGE

CASTELIAN



Price GameBoy £29.99 (Import)

Genre Platform

Publisher Triffix Entertainment

Remember *Nebulus*? It was a classy platform game starring a tiny blob called Pogo. Each of its tortuously-difficult levels was set on a tall tower. The player could move Pogo left and right, and make him jump over game or shoot at the weirdo aliens. However, in a unique twist, the towers used to rotate to follow Pogo's movement. Quite a graphical achievement on the Speccy!

Now *Nebulus* has come to the GameBoy under the title *Castelian*. And while the name may have changed the game certainly hasn't. It still looks stunning and plays well but has a difficulty rating through the roof. However, completing a tower is extremely satisfying, so if you fancy a real challenge then you know where to come.

☆☆☆

CELTIC LEGENDS



Price Atari ST/Amiga £24.99

Genre Role-Playing Game

Publisher Ubi Soft

It's amazing how you can tell, 99% of the time, what an RPG game is going to be vaguely like just by knowing what part of the world it's coming from. For example, anything that comes from California is likely to be all complex and involved, while anything from, say France or Germany, while still having all the traditional FRP elements, always tends to present things in a much more simplistic and arcadey manner. As is the case here, with this little Gallic number which is very much in the same vein as Thalion's *Dragonflight* and countless other Euro RPGs.

It's actually a fine little game, based around all the old RPG cliches, but handling them with traditional French style and aplomb. It's all set in the mythical world of Celtica, where the misuse of magic by an evil sorcerer has wrenched the kingdom in twain.

What follows is a mix of strategy and conventional RPG elements presented from a number of viewpoints - on the battlefield, high above the world itself and so on, depending upon the scene.

Though in gameplay terms it offers nothing that seasoned fans of the genre will find particularly earth-shattering,

it's different enough in terms of presentation and style to make it well worth investigating - especially for novice gamers who may be looking for an accessible and appealing introduction to the genre.

☆☆☆

CENTURION - DEFENDER OF ROME



Price Megadrive £34.99

Genre Action Strategy

Publisher Electronic Arts

Cast as an aspiring Centurion, it's the player's duty to both defend the homeland and expand the Roman Empire as far afield as possible. This megalomaniacal aim is somewhat foiled at first by the fact that the player starts with just a single legion of soldiers and a city of citizens to keep under control.

The game is a well-judged blend of icon-driven strategy and arcade-style interludes. For example, to keep the subdued provinces happy, the player can take part in chariot races and keep taxes light. As the game progresses the armies under your command grow and ships placed at your disposal to take armies to neighbouring shores become bigger and better. If the player's lucky he can even have a crack at seducing the voluptuous Cleopatra. Poor old Megadrive owners in particular are starved of this type of game, so if you're looking for something to exercise your brain a little, you could do far worse than this.

☆☆☆

CHOPLIFTER 2



Price Gameboy £24.99

Genre Arcade Blast

Publisher Nintendo

Choplifter first appeared in 1983 via Broderbund and is still fondly remembered today. The player's mission as super-crack helicopter pilot is to rescue survivors from a horizontally scrolling warzone. To do this the player must land near the waving refugees and wait for them to board. This can be quite harrowing at times as you're a proverbial sitting duck for all the enemy gun installations and machine-gunning planes which constantly lay siege.

The player's copter is equipped with a rapid-firing cannon and a limited

number of bombs with which to protect himself. And that's really all there is to it - however, like *Defender*, Choplifter is one of those games that, once played, is never forgotten. Fast action, challenging game task and a password system help make this one of the best games out on the Gameboy, and a must for any action fans collection.

☆☆☆☆

CIVILIZATION



Price IBM PC £34.99

Genre Strategy

Publisher MicroProse

American games design guru Sid Meier, fresh from his success with the brilliant *Railroad Tycoon*, has surpassed himself with this latest effort, which can truly be said to boggle the mind in terms of depth, scale and scope. Adopting the same functional top-down presentation format of *Tycoon*, the game charges the player with the task of building a civilisation, from a bunch of primitive settlers in an unexplored, uncharted world, to a global empire capable of space travel, nuclear power and the other trappings 20th Century life.

The range of factors and elements that play a part in the game is quite simply awesome, as the player's people advances and expands, founding cities, setting sail across the water, making technological discoveries and building armed forces - all while computer-controlled 'rival' empires do the same. Along the way the player must set taxes, maintain civil order, negotiate with other nations, care for the environment and take part in various arms and space races.

Civilization is undoubtedly the most involved strategy game ever conceived, and as such many less committed or novice gamers are likely to be swamped by the game's maze-like intricacies. For those willing to invest the time and effort, however, Civilization pays off like no other. Wonderful.

☆☆☆☆

CRIME TIME



Price Amiga £25.99

Genre Adventure

Publisher Starbyte

Crime Time is an attempt to break into 'adventure-without-typing' market cornered by Lucasfilm and Sierra

on the IBM PC. Unfortunately, it's not a fraction as good as their wares. The game opens with a moderately-interesting intro which takes along time to tell you that somewhere in the City a crime has been committed (tell us something we don't already know). Well, I say moderately interesting, and it is... the first time around. Unfortunately it can't be skipped and has to be watched everytime the game is loaded. Annoying.

And this over-indulgence on the part of the programmers and lack of thought for the player extends to the game itself. It's a graphic adventure - there's a picture window at the top of the screen and a list of actions and nearby items at the bottom. The idea is the player selects an action with the mouse (i.e. 'Take') and then an item from the list (i.e. 'Key'). While hardly ground-breaking in its innovation, it at least has the virtue of being a system that works reasonably well.

Movement around the game world is by clicking on the points of a compass that also sits at the bottom of the screen. As the player moves from the location to location a new graphic slowly fades in pixel... painfully slowly. Bad.

The scenery graphics are fine, but

drawn at a series of badly-skewed angles for no other reason than to be different, with the end result that they are just painful to look at. On top of that the adventure itself isn't all that interesting either. Strictly one for die-hard adventure fans only - and then only those with money to burn or one letter short of a keyboard.

☆☆

CRUISE FOR A CORPSE



Price Amiga £24.99

Genre Adventure

Publisher Delphine/US Gold

The plot for Cruise for a Corpse is firmly rooted in the Agatha Christie 'isolated location, plenty of suspects' crime story tradition, detailing how the player is invited to a Greek tycoon's yacht for a well-earned holiday only to get there and find his host bumped off by an unknown murderer. Before you can say 'Inspector Wexford' the player is forced to don poncy moustache and tufty sideburns to solve the heinous crime.

After a lot of pre-release interest from

the press, there were high hopes for Cruise for a Corpse. Is it the excellent game everyone seemed to think it's be? Well, yes... and no. In the graphics and sound department it's exemplary, with large, fluidly-animated sprites moving over exquisitely detailed backgrounds and plenty of suitable tunes and samples playing away in the background. All conspire to generate an excellent sense of mood and atmosphere.

The player directs his on-screen character ('Raoul') via the mouse. By clicking the mouse pointer on objects of interest, a menu appears listing the various things the player can do with the selected item (i.e. 'Open' or 'Examine' hat box). Movement around the yacht is effected by walking Raoul from location to location by clicking on exits to the current location, such as doors or hallways, or more quickly by calling up the yacht map and 'sending' Raoul immediately from place to place. As a user interface it's difficult to think of another as intuitive and easy to use.

The major problem with Cruise for a Corpse is its pace. The animation, though wondrous, is slow. Examining the contents of a room can become quite painful, as Raoul slowly turns,

walks, turns, bends down, examines the item only for a message to appear stating that "There is nothing of interest here". Equally annoying is the frequent though inevitable accessing and swapping of five (count 'em) game disks. All too often the player's enthusiasm for clue hunting can be severely dampened by the reduction of the game's speed to near snail's pace. Less important, some of the generally excellent French-English translation is a bit dubious in places, such as the Cabin Boy who is described as "dynamic".

Those comments apart, anyone with the patience to sit through the occasional doldrums will find Cruise for a Corpse a superb buy, heaped with quality presentation and atmosphere and presenting a big enough game task to satisfy even the greatest sleuth.

☆☆☆☆

DEATHBRINGER



Price Atari ST £25.99

Genre Beat-'Em-Up

Publisher Empire

There's this sword, right. These evil wizards have magically given it the

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ability to absorb the souls of anyone it slays. Their intention is to use it to get rid off their goody-goody though thick-thick nemeses Karn, a barbarian so stupid he can't even spell his own name right. However, luck isn't on the wizards' side, and the sword finds its way into Karn's calloused hands. Hardly believing his luck, Karn sets out to give the sword back to the wizards - in style. Basically it's all a thinly-veiled excuse for a sideways scrolling bloodfest of hacking and slaying, with Karn plowing through wave after wave of bizarre monsters.

Deathbringer boasts some of the most impressive parallax-scrolling backgrounds yet seen, even if they are somewhat lacking in colour. The sprites are well-drawn with a nice line in humour, but they're rather garish in a monochromatic sort of way. But despite its good graphics and adequate sound, Deathbringer's real problem is that it's basically a bit dull. The combat moves are limited in range and slow to implement and just wandering along, endlessly plugging away at the baddies, is not all that interesting. And the prettiest backdrops in the whole World can't make up for that. *Barbarian III* this ain't.

☆☆☆

DEUTEROS



Price Amiga £24.99
Genre Strategy
Publisher Activision

This sequel to *Millennium 2.2* by the same authors is set a thousand years after the prequel's events. Mankind has fallen into a sort of post-technological malaise and forgotten its former space-travelling glory. It's the player's task to rekindle man's passion for the stars and turn the race into the masters of the Galaxy once again. The gameplay boils down to endless resource and manpower allocation between various departments, dealing with the occasional crises that crop up and so on. Although programmed well and moderately enthralling, there really isn't anything on show that hasn't been done more entertainingly elsewhere. Strictly one for the strategy die-hard.

☆☆☆

E.A. HOCKEY



Price Megadrive £34.99

Genre Sports Arcade
Publisher Electronic Arts

Like *Kick Off* with fighting in, Electronic Arts' Hockey will appeal to everyone. A section of teams from around the globe, each wit their own abilities and weaknesses battle it out in the Ice hockey World League.

Following on from their success with *John Madden's Football*, EA pull yet another winner out of the bag with this, perhaps their most frenetic title to date.

Having selected the length of game, whether the player wishes to compete in a one-off match or a knock-out, selected his team and that of the enemy, it's game on! Skating around the rink is simple enough, and control over the puck is surprisingly instinctive. Since the rink is so small and the players can move so swiftly and violently against each other, Ice Hockey is an extremely rapid, high scoring game. Basically, whoever gets the puck from the face-off is most likely to score. Until, of course, the player gets the hang of the wide variety of tackling moves available to him, from a good honest going-for-the-puck scenario to a full body check.

Rile an opposition player on a too-regular basis, though, and you'd better be ready to put your fist where his mouth

is, as one of the features included is brawling. While the rest of your team are trying to do some good, it's possible to clang away at that guy who skated over your shoes for as long as you like! A graphic and gameplay marvel, E.A. Hockey is wholeheartedly recommended to one and all. Hooray!

☆☆☆☆☆

ELF



Price Amiga £25.95
Genre Arcade Adventure
Publisher Ocean

As Cornelius the Elf, it's the player's task to rescue his sweetheart Elisa from the pointy-nailed clutches of Necrilous the Not Very Nice. The game takes place over six Tolkien-esque levels filled with platforms, pitfalls, ladders and bridges. Cornelius' magic powder allows him to protect himself from Necrilous' rampant horde of henchcreatures by firing bolts of magic energy. Numerous interest-sustaining spells and power-ups can be bought from Ye Olde Localle Shoppe using cash picked up along the way.

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sents its own unique set of problems
to solve and tasks to achieve, requir-
ing that the player constantly evolve
new strategies to deal with them. All
in all Elf is a polished high-quality romp,
perfect for platform or arcade adven-
ture fans.

☆☆☆☆

F-15 STRIKE EAGLE II



Price Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £29.99

Genre Simulations

Publisher MicroProse

MicroProse make a departure from
their usual rigorously-accurate sims
with this action-orientated affair. It's
the flight sim equivalent of the Janet
and John books, i.e. nice n' simple with
no complications. Players have six com-
bat arenas to choose between, each
with various missions to select. These
missions are nearly all simple 'get in,
destroy a couple of targets and get out
alive' jobs, with the player have to simul-
taneously defend against swarms of
enemy jets. Control is via keyboard,
joystick or mouse and is highly respon-
sive in each case.

The screen update is fast enough but
there are quicker 3D routines about -
it's more than adequate for the job in
hand, however. Sound is disappoint-
ing, with a white-noise hiss being being
the player's only audio companion for
most of the journey. In the gameplay
department this is a winner, with plen-
ty of white-knuckle action to get the
adrenalin pumping. Veterans may
bemoan the game's lack of depth, but
anyone else should find this just their
cup of tea, with a yummy Jammy
Dodger in the saucer to boot.

☆☆☆☆

FACE OFF



Price Atari ST/Amiga £25.99

Genre Sport Game

Publisher Krisalis

There aren't that many Ice Hockey
games available on the Amiga. In fact,
there aren't any. So Face Off is some-
thing of a welcome addition to the
canon of sports games. Worth getting?
Well, yes and no. Like *Manchester United
Europe*, it's a very polished game, with
some super slick menu and option
screens. There's a league to participate
in, where the player can do anything
from train the players to rename the

manager. And like *MUE*, the player
can turn off the arcade game and con-
centrate on the managerial side of
things if they're that way inclined, or
alternatively just play the arcade game
alone.

The arcade side of things is okay,
although some may wish the action
had just a touch more zip. Certainly
compared to *E.A. Hockey* it's distinct-
ly sluggish. Control is simple and easy
to pick up - shoot, pass or thump via
the joystick - and the sport is fun, espe-
cially when things get a little physical
and the fists start flying. As standard
on most sports games these days there's
a replay function so that that blister-
ing goal can be replayed again and
again. Overall, *Face Off* is a rounded
package, though unlikely to exactly
grab the public's imagination. Fans of
the sport will enjoy it, but just how
many of them are there in the UK?

☆☆☆☆

FATAL REWIND



Price MegaDrive £34.99

Genre Arcade Blast

Publisher Psygnosis/Electronic Arts

Psygnosis disappoints nobody with its
first foray onto the 16-bit consoles,
maintaining the same high quality of
graphics and sound that's made it the
legend it is in the Amiga market. And
thankfully in this case there's the game-
play to back up the visuals. But if *The
Killing Game Show* had to be renamed
for its transition from the Amiga to
the MegaDrive, couldn't they have come
up with something a little better than
Fatal Rewind? Apart from the fact that
it doesn't actually mean much, it's a
fairly obvious attempt to sound like
Total Recall, a film which bears no
resemblance to this game at all.

The player is put in charge of a
mechanical walker reminiscent of the
ED-209s in *Robocop*. An agile little
thing, it can run left and right, jump,
fire and even climb up the sides of
walls. Things they can do nowadays,
huh? The player has to negotiate a net-
work of platforms in the hunt for the
exit to the next level. Aliens fly on from
all sides, swirling and swarming about
the screen with the sole intent of see-
ing the player bite the dust. And just
to give the player a touch more incen-
tive to escape the platforms are slow-
ly sinking into a deadly red sea. The
need to find keys to certain areas adds
a small amount of depth to the game,
but these arcade adventure elements

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never swamp what is basically a very classy and addictive shoot-'em-up.
☆☆☆☆

FINAL FIGHT



Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **US Gold**

Yet another in US Gold's seemingly endless string of CapCom conversions. In *Metro City* (loosely based on *Noo Yoik*) all is not well. Crime is rife and to make a bad situation worse the Mayor's right-dreamy daughter has been kidnapped by - you guessed it - Mr Big. (This old Mr Big certainly gets around, doesn't he?) The player and optional partner have to fist-fight their ways through the city's wastelands to rescue her. Why? Why not?

Final Fight is something of a first for beat-'em-ups on the home computer, i.e. it's actually quite good. The sprites are large and decently animated, the background scroll is smooth and the action is fast. Someone of the detecting whether a punch connects or not is a little dodgy, but apart from that this can be recommended unreservedly to anyone who fancies a little aggro without bruising their knuckles.

☆☆☆☆

FLICKY



Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Sega**

"Don't be put off by the screenshots on the back of the box" is probably the best bit of advice I can give about Flicky. It looks awful - tiny primary-colour sprites and garish backdrops. And to be honest, things don't improve much in the game itself. However, like *Quasimodo*, an ugly appearance conceals the goodness inside.

The player controls the tiny bird of the title. The lickle darling's chicks have gone and got themselves lost in the rooms of a giant cat-infested house. Flicky has to run and jump about, collect her scattered brood and take them to the safety of the Exit, while avoiding the prowling felines. Flicky is a wonderfully playable game, very simple but packed with fun. Some may dispute whether there's £35-worth of fun, but for those with the cash it's a good purchase.

116 ACE

☆☆☆☆

FLOOR 13



Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

The myth that strategy games are boring has been well and truly exploded by a game that's likely to convert even confirmed trigger-addicts to a more staple and intelligent software diet. *Floor 13* offers a new slant on the strategy genre by basing itself around a compelling scenario and offering gameplay that goes beyond the regular strategy framework.

Set in present-day Britain, it tells of a government-run secret police force that must avert scandals, wipe out subversive elements and generally protect the government from embarrassing incidents so that it doesn't fall from grace. As Director General of this corrupt agency, the player is solely responsible for its operations.

The game is played almost entirely from a single static screen of an office desk, onto which intelligence reports and newspaper stories arrive from the outside world and form the basis of the information which the player works from as plots and storylines unfold. Various sub-departments, such as surveillance, interrogation and disinformation are the instruments of the player's will, with shady agents tailing suspects, tapping phones, searching premises and even torturing and killing people to achieve the government's immoral aims.

The way in which the game reveals information as half-clues and red herrings mean that good detective work and thorough cross-checking of intelligence data is as important as the conventional strategic skills which are also required. It's all thoroughly absorbing, very realistic stuff, and comes highly recommended, even to those who can't normally stand strategy games.

☆☆☆☆

FOOTBALL DIRECTOR II



Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **D&H Games**

Yaaaaaawn. Don't get me wrong, I've got nothing against football - there's just something implicitly boring about

management games of this type. *Player Manager* is the exception to the rule, firstly because it's so excellent and secondly because you got to play *Kick Off* with it, which made it doubly excellent. When faced with something like this, though, it's difficult to imagine anybody but the most desperate sort of gamer or die-hard footy fan actually getting any enjoyment out of it.

Technically of course, there's nothing to fault it, and the depth that the game goes into is commendable - you've got your league and cup trophies, financial problems, player injuries, team tactics, talent scouts, stadium management and all the rest of it. On the aesthetic side, however, nothing much seems to have changed since the days when these games were prevalent on the Spectrum about three or four years ago.

These days, however, the cheapo graphics and sound just don't cut it any more, do when something like this comes along it seems like a bit of an embarrassment, really. But of course it's the gameplay that counts and for what it is, *Football Director* is entertaining enough, and providing you're not expecting too much and willing to give the game some time, it should pay off handsomely. The wiser members of the computerised football-management fraternity will probably want to save their pennies for *Player Manager 2*, however.

☆☆☆

FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX



Price **Atari ST/Amiga £34.99**
Genre **Racing Simulation**
Publisher **MicroProse**

Believe you me, you've never seen a racing game like this. *Lotus 2? OutRun Europa? Indianapolis 500? Pah!* They are but children's toys compared to the complete and utter excellence of *Formula One Grand Prix*, the latest and greatest game from the programming genius that is Geoff 'Stunt Car Racer' Crammond. The graphics are truly amazing, with highly-detailed cars (complete with driver's helmet poking out of the cockpit) literally zooming around tracks lined with stands, trees, fences and cranes. The sound matches the visuals, with good use made of throaty samples for the engine.

But it's not just the quality of the graphics or the sounds that makes *FrGP* so special, it's the meticulous attention

to detail that generates an authentic and involving Grand Prix atmosphere. Everything you'd expect to find on a Grand Prix circuit - stands, bridges, tunnels, etc - is there (and in the identical position they'd be found in real life), even extending right down to stewards pushing crippled cars off the track and engineer crews waiting in the pits.

The wonderful control over the car is the essential icing on the cake, with plenty of difficulty modifiers to make the game easy enough for Granny Smith to play or tough enough to bring Sterling Moss out in beads of sweat. Indeed, so good is *FrGP* that it earned itself an ACE Trailblazer and the honour of becoming the new *Racing Simulation Benchmark*. Good enough for you?

☆☆☆☆

GUNSHIP 2000



Price **IBM PC £39.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **MicroProse**

Nobody writes simulations like Microprose does. This is a highly-realistic sequel to the company's earlier mega-hit *Gunship*, which has gone down in software history as one of the best-selling sims ever. This sequel is far more than just *Gunship+*. Every part of the game has been given a radical overhaul.

Probably the most impressive aspect is the revamped graphics system. Using a sort of patchwork-quilt landscaping technique, the gameworld has been modelled in exacting detail, complete with rise, hills, mountains, valleys, cuttings. If it's a geographical feature, it's there. As usual, the game takes the form of a series of pilot-testing missions. Unfortunately this complexity means that you really need at least a 16MHz PC to get anything approaching speed from the game. Sound with a board is marvelously atmospheric, and adds no end to the gritty battlefield feel.

The 'copter control is good, but actually getting the craft to fly matches that of the real thing, i.e. it's very difficult, and certainly makes *Gunship 2000* not the sort of game to cut your sim-playing teeth on. However, if you're looking for the ultimate chopper simulation, then here it is.

☆☆☆☆

HARD NOVA

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Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Hard Nova's a game that's difficult to categorise. Like *Starflight 2* it's a mixture of styles, boasting strategy as well as role-playing elements, adventure as well as arcade space-flight sequences. It's the sort of stuff that Electronic Arts in America have been churning out for years - science fiction odysseys with alien worlds, sleazy mutant characters, big spaceships clanging together and all the rest of it. There's supposedly a comic edge to this one, with the player taking on the persona of wisecracking space bitch Hard Nova.

You can interact with characters, RPG-fashion, collect objects, do missions and trek across the galaxy, kidnapping, ferrying cargo from planet to planet and so on and so forth.

It sounds like a bit of a cop out, but if this sort of malarkey is your cup of tea, then you're liable to have a lot of long-lasting fun with it - it's just a shame that the vast majority of gamers don't have the patience to get into it. Well worth checking out - the game's got

plenty of atmosphere (ho ho!), and gets progressively more involving the longer it's played. Just don't expect to pick it up straight away.

☆☆☆

HEIMDALL



Price **Amiga (1Mb) £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Core Design**

After a long string of shoot'em-ups and platform games (*Car-Vup*, *Frenetic*, *Chuck Rock*), Core Design has returned to more involving territory with Heimdall, an isometric arcade adventure cum role playing game based around Viking lore.

The Heimdall of the title is a human gift from the Gods, sent to Earth by Odin to recover the three great weapons that will vanquish the forces of evil. After selecting a crew from the varied characters available, Hemidall sets sail across the Nordic waters to destinations unknown.

For the most part, the game is yer basic isometric adventure à la *The Immortal*, although there are some

interesting strategic and FRP elements - all the characters have differing skills, which means that the player must switch between them, as in a conventional RPG, to perform certain tasks. The strategy is provided by the seafaring section, where the player must travel between the various islands (there are three archipelagos, each hiding one of the ehtereal weapons and each forming an independent level) in the most efficient manner.

Heimdall is a fun adventure game, although the action, due to the product's FRP overtones, is a little slower and less exciting than most of its counterparts in the genre. In fact, there are times when very little seems to be happening at all, and only those who are willing to buckle down, make maps and all the rest of it, are likely to enjoy the game to the full.

That said, it's been designed with the utmost care and cleverness, and there's enough here to kep anybody glued to the screen for some considerable time. A fine game.

☆☆☆☆☆

HUDSON HAWK



Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Ocean**

Bruce Willis' film was a disaster, and Ocean hadn't turned out anything of note in the film conversion stakes for quite a while, so nobody was really expecting very much out of Hudson Hawk. But instead of the usual cynical and barely-playable licence, what we got was the best platform game so far this year. Special FX took a big gamble in its interpretation of the film by chucking 99% of the source material out of the window, and getting on with the business of just building a good game around the film's basic premise - that of a cat burglar stealing valuable artifacts from around the world.

It works superbly, in much the same style as former platform classics like *Mario*, *Rick Dangerous* and *Switchblade*, with small, comical characters playing over tortuously-designed platform levels. It's a class act, without a doubt, with fiendish traps and pitfalls lurking around every corner. The gameplay is easily up to console/arcade

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standard, and the graphics and sound really do enhance the fun factor because they're so jolly. Don't be put off by the shoddy licence connotations - Hudson Hawk is a brilliant game in its own right and deserves a place in your collection. Today.
☆☆☆☆

HUNTER



Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**

Genre **Action Strategy**

Publisher **Activision**

It's a sad old world, this one we live in. Just when poor old Activision get some decent product together, their Mediagenic daddy goes and pulls the plug on them. Now, however, after the aforementioned 'decent product' has been swilling around doing very little indeed for the last few months, Activision's current putter-outer of games, The Disc Company have taken it upon themselves to let another trickle of gameyness reach the streets.

Hunter is the sort of game that you dream of playing. A polygon based action strategy game will all of the usually associated nonsense removed, it offers all the "wouldn't it be great if..." features which should, by rights, be included in all these games.

Taking the role of the Hunter, the player must travel around a bunch of islands, systematically destroying all enemy installations in whatever way he sees fit. Your particular mission is detailed in a briefing where specific, immediate targets are detailed by your allied commander.

The best thing about Hunter is that there's no messing about. If you want to infiltrate an enemy base, get a disguise and you're away! If you want to get about, steal a helicopter/jeep/truck or sailboard. It's all so easy and because the unnecessary complexity of basic tasks has been removed, the player can concentrate on progressing with the mission much more intently.

Excellent graphics and a fast-paced storyline can only add to Hunter's already awe-inspiring style. A winner.
☆☆☆☆

THE IMMORTAL



Price **IBM PC £30.99**

Genre **Arcade Adventure**

Publisher **Electronic Arts**

It's over a year now since The Immortal appeared to great public acclaim on the Amiga. A masterpiece of animation and game design, it was probably responsible for selling a fair few 1Mb upgrades. At last it's made its way on to the PC, and now features a couple of new enhancements that make it any even better game.

The majority of the game is identical. The player guides a superbly-animated wizard on his travels around an isometric-3D dungeon. As he progresses around the corridors, he discovers treasure, traps and - of course - terrifying monsters. In the original Amiga game, the fairly complex combat took place at the same scale as the rest of the game (i.e. small) and it made judging responses to the opponents lunges and feints a touch difficult. On the PC, however, when combat occurs the view switches to a close-up that makes things far easier.

The only gripe from a PC owners point of view is that having been spoiled by the recent plethora of 256-colour games, the 16 on display here are a little disappointing. However, this doesn't seriously detract from what is an otherwise excellent game, and recommended without hesitation to anyone who fancies a bit of dungeon n' dragging.
☆☆☆☆

JIMMY WHITE'S 'WHIRLWIND' SNOOKER



Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**

Genre **Sport Simulation**

Publisher **Virgin Games**

Archer Maclean, veteran programmer of *IK+* and *Dropzone* is probably the last person you'd expect to write a snooker sim. Cue games have been around since the beginning of computer gaming - a few coloured shapes, some angle-of-deflection algorithms and away you go. But even with the advent of 3D graphics, none of them have really had any element of realism, until now.

The table is viewed from behind the cue ball so the player can line up shots as if on a real table. The view can be rotated through various axes and zoomed in on so the player can see from virtually every angle conceivable. The ball movement is accurate, without balls stopping for no apparent reason or going off at peculiar angles.

Two player games are the best, but

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four levels of computer opponent are available for the lone gamer. As the player progresses more sophisticated tactics can be incorporated, like positional play. Swerve, stun, screw and every type of spin are all possible, and are vital for snookering opponents. The end result of JWS's comprehensive and realistic approach to recreating snooker is the most authentic sports simulation to date.

☆☆☆☆☆

LOTUS TURBO CHALLENGE 2



Price **Amiga £24.99**

Genre **Racing Game**

Publisher **Gremlin Graphics**

A worthy successor to the excellent *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge*, this game has a number of interesting differences to its predecessor. For a start, it's a better one-player game, but not so good for two players. Technically superior to the original, there's nevertheless something just a little bit lacking. Perhaps it's the removal of the laps system, or perhaps it's the fact that crashing into the other cars really doesn't do you that much damage. But whatever, it ain't quite as good.

However, it IS a great deal better than 80% of the driving games on the market, and there's a Link-up option allowing up to four players to race at once. The action is fast and furious and the control the players have over their cars has been greatly improved.

Players must blast their way through a selection of stages, each boasting a particular hazard, whether it be natural (snow, rain, sand) or man-made (enormous juggernauts rumbling across the road). Graphically superior to the vast majority of similar titles, Lotus just looks the business, with flashy trackside obstacles and a high level of detail on the cars themselves.

Despite being hampered by some aggravating deceleration whenever the player drives through any water and the flawed two player mode, Lotus 2 is a pretty impressive game.

☆☆☆☆☆

LAST NINJA 3



Price **Amiga £24.99**

Genre **Arcade Adventure**

Publisher **System 3**

Well, well, well. After everyone has been shining up their shoes at the prospect of giving System 3's much touted, much lorded and much delayed conclusion of the Ninja series a right old kicking, the bleeding thing turns out to be great!

Applying a more arcade-adventure angle to the tried and tested Ninja formula, the boys at the System have produced a game which has all the visual appeal of the first two games in the series and none of the problems. Well, that's not quite the case, but instead of the game relying so heavily on the fight routines which, to be honest, were never that good, the emphasis has been moved onto the puzzle-solving element which isn't half as hard to implement.

Spanning an epic quest across a bunch of different zones (earth, air, fire, water and void) the game continually throws up different puzzles which the player must solve in order to reach the next stage.

Aside from completing these puzzles, there's a fair amount of rucking to be done too, and the collectible weapons add enough novelty to ensure that even when the player is doing over his twelfth adversary of the level, he'll find something new to do.

Graphically, the game is really rather special, with the isometric landscapes at a stage which must surely be approaching the state of the art, and the animations of the characters themselves being undeniably fine. Just look at the speed blur on that.

☆☆☆☆☆

LEISURESUIT LARRY 5



Price **IBM PC £34.99**

Genre **Adventure**

Publisher **Sierra On-Line**

He's Larry Laffer! She's Passionate Patti! And they're in a whole lot of trouble! Leisure Suit Larry 5, the latest instalment in the impossibly successful adventure series chronicles the spying adventures of America's favourite lounge lizard.

In what promises to be the most sexy adventure in the series, the player must guide Larry and Patti through a world of porn and mobsters in the quest to keep good honest smut on the airwaves. Initially taking the role of the audition host of America's Sexiest Home Videos, Larry quickly becomes embroiled in a hairbrained underworld plot to get all porn off the normal market and drive

it underground where enormous profits can be made.

It's all pretty standard point and click stuff, but this time the player alternates between the very different personas of Larry and Patti, allowing both to get into sexy scrapes and also avoiding and particularly severe cries of "Sexism!" from bendy liberal wets.

Again, the hand-painted 256-colour graphics and game design are an excellent splint for what occasionally lapses into a bout of pretty lame gags. However, this time Larry does have moments of absolute brilliance, and the continual promise of a further saucy pic of a top spy in a saucy pose is enough to keep you coming back for more. No? Well, please yourselves.

☆☆☆☆☆

MAGIC GARDEN



Price **Amiga £24.99**

Genre **Arcade Adventure**

Publisher **Electronic Zoo**

Good God! Whatever next. Having been plagued for months by an apparently never-ending stream of ceramic gnomes, we were understandably keen to get our hands on the game which they promote. And what a peculiar concoction it is.

In his endeavours to become 'the most efficient gnome', the player must guide a gnome around the eponymous magic garden doing, well, this is where it becomes a little bit unclear actually. He can do pretty much whatever he fancies. He can water the flowers. He can mow the lawn. He can use some magic seeds and fly around on the back of a big dragonfly! But the gnome must be careful, for there are terrible traps which live in the garden like big flowers which can hurt him or tall grass which can slow him down.

And Gnomey had better be careful with the number of objects he's carrying, or he will become too tired and get hit by lightning and die. But the gnome won't get hit by lightning if he is exploring the underground caverns where the toilet is! Gnomey can flush the toilet for extra efficiency.

Presented in side-on elevation, the game looks, plays, smells tastes and is just odd. It's as odd as anything I've ever seen in my life. Peculiar Beatrix Potter style graphics and gameplay which quite honestly is tricky to imagine appealing to the masses make Magic Garden a true enigma.

☆☆☆

MARTIAN MEMORANDUM



Price **IBM PC £35.99**

Genre **Adventure**

Publisher **Access/US Gold**

Once again a game pretends to be an 'interactive movie' and turns out to be little more than a simplistic adventure with flashy graphics and sound. But in Martian Memorandum's case the aesthetics are enough to make up for the game design's shortcomings - or at least they seem to be for the first few hours. The game uses digitised video footage, sampled speech and film quality music to set the scene (the story casts you as a futuristic private detective who must travel to Mars to track down the kidnapped daughter of a famous industrialist), and it works very well, creating a strong sense of atmosphere and involvement.

But as is so often the case with games of this type, the effect of these flashy gimmicks soon wears off and when you actually buckle down to play the game you realise that there isn't really that much to see or do. An ardent adventurer could easily complete it inside of a week, because the linear game design means that it's almost impossible to go down the wrong track - it's as if you're being guided by an invisible helping hand, and that's not very satisfying. Both *Rise Of The Dragon* and *Heart Of China* offer similar and more satisfying experiences, so if you've got the PC muscle to run so demanding a product, you'd be well advised to check either of those out instead.

☆☆

MEGAFORTRESS



Price **IBM PC £34.99**

Genre **Simulation**

Publisher **Mindscape**

The trouble with games based on taking every single role in a big, stupid old plane like the B-52 is that virtually every role is mind-numbingly boring. I mean, who honestly wants to plot their course across thousands of miles of terrain using a 3D terrain mapping computer or have to fiddle around with ultrasound frequencies in order to jam the enemy's radar?

The aim of the game is to pilot a battle-scarred B-52 across both Iraq and the Soviet 'Union', keeping the location and aim of your mission utterly

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secret until the awesome tonnage of firepower can be unleashed on the target. Unfortunately, for all it's gung-ho packaging and intent, Megafortress is just a very good simulation of a rather dull business. Far more fun can be had in any of a host of more recently released flight games, and Microprose's Stealth Fighter series even offer similar creep-up-on-the-enemy antics for those players who are especially keen on that sort of thing.

Perfectly competent both graphically and on the play front, Megafortress has missions designed by real B-52 navigator and best selling author Dale Brown, although it's one of those games that I guess you really need to have experienced the real thing to appreciate.

☆☆☆

MEGA LO MANIA



Price Amiga £24.99
Genre Arcade Strategy
Publisher Image Works

Released amid a bunch of God-sims that are still coming thick and fast, Mirrorsoft's offering has fared better than most, steering sufficiently clear of the Big Daddy *Populous* while not being afraid to borrow little bits here and there where appropriate.

Set in an alternate universe, Mega lo Mania is all about the quest for power. Power over a set of worlds, each made up from a suite of islands, to be precise. New worlds are formed and intelligent life is placed upon them, upon which interstellar freeloaders descend and try to seize the reigns of power for themselves.

The conflict arises, needless to say, when more than one freeloader takes a shine to a particular island. Since each area can only have one ruler, a campaign of imperialism begins, with each player trying to use the forces at his disposal to overthrow the others.

Each island exists within its own time period, and the rate of development, intelligence and so on of its inhabitants is governed accordingly. Players quick to invest time in invention and the refining of natural elements, rather than simply running around hitting the others with sticks are more likely to succeed.

☆☆☆☆☆

MEGATRAVELLER 2: QUEST FOR THE

ANCIENTS



Price IBM PC £TBA
Genre Role-Playing Game
Publisher Empire

This latest UK release from American software team Paragon is none too surprisingly a sequel to *Mega Traveller 1: The Zhodani Conspiracy*. As before, the player leads a team of five space adventurers through toil and trouble to (hopefully) riches and fame. This time around, the player task is to find a way to halt the flow of toxic slime emanating from a mysterious set of ruins left by a dead race called the Ancients. But are they dead? That is up to the player to find out...

Sporting high-quality 256-colour VGA, this is certainly a treat on the eye, and the ears as well with a suitable sound card. The game itself is an RPG in the *Ultima* style, but not half as rigorous - which for many will be more than a blessing. The story is fun and involving, with plenty of sub-tasks to perform that provide welcome and often amusing relief from the main plot. If one has a minor niggle it's that the space combat - which you'd think would be the most exciting part of the game - is flat and dull, with little sense of player involvement. In summary, highly recommended.

☆☆☆☆

MEGA TWINS



Price Atari ST/Amiga £25.99
Genre Platform Game
Publisher US Gold

There's big trouble in the land of cutey things. A dark shadow, etc, etc, has fallen across the land, and it's up to the two sweetest and most unthreatening warriors ever to grace computer software to save the day. At its core Mega Twins is a platform game - one or two players guide their cutesy heroes through level after level of ledges and chasms, seeing off the attacking monsters with a lunge from their tiny little swords. Magic orbs can be found along the way that act as super weapons, which are, particularly useful against the super-tough end-of-level nasties.

As a conversion of the CapCom coin-op Mega Twins is hardly startling, but it's competent enough. Apart from the slightly turgid pace of the action, the main thing that prevents Mega Twins

from making any real impression is the lack of excitement. There are no real thrills on offer - the platform element is minor, and having to endlessly tap fire to jab the beasts into oblivion is hardly opening up whole new vistas of tele-visual entertainment. The final nail in the coffin is the fact that the whole thing is incredibly easy - a competent player will probably get half-way through the game on his first set of credits. Mega Twins had A-grade potential, but whether it's the fault of the original coin-op or the conversion it's actually turned out to be Meagre rather than Mega.

☆☆☆

MiG29M SUPER FULCRUM



Price IBM PC £34.99
Genre Simulation
Publisher Domark

Improving on an already successful formula, Domark have done away with many of the longevity problems of their first MiG game and have set this game against an epic backdrop of conflict in southern America. Taking the role of the pilot of a United Nations controlled MiG, the player must launch himself into hostile airspace from a solitary allied-controlled airbase - his mission is to gradually erode the stinking rebel infidels' grasp on the area by blowing up their supply lines and destroying their fuel depots.

It's bizarre that the company most recently associated with not especially excellent coin-op conversions should turn out such a classy simulation, and as a result, it may be tough for them to find the right audience. Nevertheless, a classy product it is, with a bunch of external views and a flexibility of mission structure enabling the inventive player to try his hand at planning his own strategies for doing away with the enemy threat.

Also included in this game is an implementation of the real MiG's fly-by-wire system, an auto-stabilising device which prevents the plane from flicking around all over the place like a big girl's blouse. Most handy in combat.

Presented, surprisingly enough, in polygon graphics, MiG beats the competition on the ease-of-use front, even if it is a bit tricky to imagine it outlasting some of the more intense Microprose products. A winner.

☆☆☆☆

MIGHT AND MAGIC III: ISLES OF TERRA



Price IBM PC £34.99
Genre Role-Playing Game
Publisher New World Computing/US Gold

"By my mighty sword of Zorak, I, Hagar Dragonbone, must smite the evil doom-legions of Krynn before the alignment of the six moon-worlds!" Yes, well, you get the general idea. Might And Magic III is yet another delve into the much-explored realms of FRP gaming, this time coming over as a cross between *Dungeon Master* and *The Bard's Tale*. Is it just me or has the whole FRP genre been done to death so badly that there's just nothing new anymore?

This third Might And Magic outing would seem to support that argument, as apart from some very flashy VGA visuals and soundboard sonics, there seems to be very little new or interesting on offer, except maybe for that ever-persistent fraternity of die-hard RPG fanatics. As you'd suspect, the scenario is about as hackneyed as one is ever going to get, with some claptrap about returning the Ultimate Power Orbs (mmm, yes!) to the King. What that involves is selecting a party of dwarves, orcs, heroes, warriors and all that, and then wandering about fighting with dragons, collecting treasure and picking up clues.

The game itself actually is very pretty, but for the most part the adventuring is pretty slow and insubstantial. Considering, however, how conditioned FRP gamers have become, I doubt that anybody who's likely to buy it will be disappointed by what they find.

☆☆☆

MONSTER BUSINESS



Price Amiga £24.99
Genre Platform
Publisher Eclipse

The mad meanies from the big forest have once again broken loose, and are searching for little items they can steal completely spoiling Mr Bob's construction site. Become Leroy, the best beast buster around and blow all these nasty little monsters sky high! A goal in life if ever there was one. Monster business, the epitome of the average arcade game features stupid graphics and a doubly stupid premise - to retrieve all the objects from the building site, Leroy must blow up all the monsters

with some sort of fatal bicycle pump, causing them to inflate and eventually rise to the top of the screen, dropping all their objects as they go.

Despite the idiocy of the whole affair, *Monster Business* is actually quite good. Different screens each present a different sort of hazard, whether it be sliding platforms or a speedy time limit, and the player is so interested in trying to get to the end of the level that he probably won't realise quite how crass and daft the game is.

Smart graphics and it-could-only-be-German music help *Monster Business* rise about the pack and shine out as an example of what arcade games should be about. It's like an Abba record, if you know what I mean.

☆☆☆☆

NEBULUS 2



Price **Amiga £25.99**

Genre **Platform**

Publisher **21st Century Entertainment**

Rising from the Hewson ashes like a phoenix looking exceptionally like whatever it was before it was burnt, 21st Century Entertainment aren't having much luck at the moment. Not only are they having some considerable difficulty with their Megadrive product, but the one game that looked like it could actually make them some money has turned out to be somewhat of a disappointment.

The European coders responsible for sequelling John Phillips' original classic have done a bit of a botch job, ruining the gameplay that made the first game so excellent by piling on lots of inane and useless power-up type features. The classic formula has been totally swamped by the sheer weight of these new 'ideas', and as such anybody who enjoyed the first game is likely to be very disappointed by this. However, it is quite pretty and, at least for those who haven't seen the first game, not a total washout on the playability front. But while the first game knew exactly where the addiction/frustration threshold was, *Nebulus 2* steps over it like it wasn't even there. Not recommended.

☆☆

OUTRUN EUROPA



Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**

Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **US Gold**

At long last! A game that has become a legend, along with the likes of *Star Trek* and *Birds of Prey*, over the last couple of years, simply because it's taken so bloody long to come out. The original idea was to release the product to cash in on the wave of euphoria from the original *OutRun* conversion - which should give you an idea of how long we've been waiting for it. We ended up getting the official sequel, *Turbo OutRun* first, which wasn't much cop, and now we've got this, which isn't either.

The basic idea is that the player has to take charge of a variety of vehicles - car, bike and boat - as he races over various land-and-sea stages to deliver a vital package, while international agents are out to stop you. It's all a bit ludicrous really, and what's seemingly supposed to be a cross between *OutRun* and *Chase H.Q.* with extra knobs on is in fact a bit of a shoddy mess. The road sections aren't much fun to play because control of the vehicles is so bloody oversensitive, and the enemy cars just keep on getting in the way in a way that isn't conducive to gameplay at all, but is just very frustrating. The boat bits don't even bear think about because they're so unjust and difficult, and 99% of players will probably put their foot through the monitor screen within five minutes of loading it up. Talking of loading, the constant disk accessing is a pain in the prostate, and it all hardly seems worth it when it's not even very clear what's actually going on in the game. There are far better race games available, so don't waste your precious time pondering over this one.

☆

PITFIGHTER



Price **Amiga £25.99**

Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**

Publisher **Domark**

If ever there's a prime example of an excellent conversion of an average coin-op then *Pitfighter* is it. If you're an arcade goer then you're probably more than familiar with the game. With its giant monitor screen, three sets of player controls and stand-out digitised graphics you could hardly miss it. Trouble was, underneath the unique flashy visuals and meaty sound lurked a distinctly dull beat-'em-up, made even worse by the confusion caused by the grainy-looking graphics. Where's my bloke gone? Is he hitting me or not?

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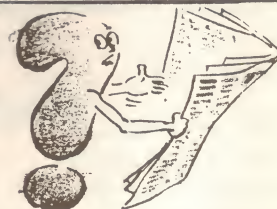
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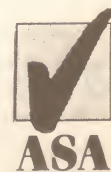
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You know the sort of thing. All in all, a less than rewarding experience.

In converting Pitfighter for the home systems, Teque London have actually improved it a Hell of a lot. Indeed, if you liked the coin-op, chances are you'll like the home game even more. The graphics, which have retained pretty much all of the flash special FX of the coin-op, are clearer, and the slower pace makes the game much easier to play. The joystick controls are a little uninstinctive, but it only takes a few goes to get the swing of things. But as good a conversion as it is, it still can't compensate for the fact that fundamentally Pitfighter's about as exciting as tapping a fire button all day. Which, er, in Pitfighter is pretty much what you spend all your time doing.

☆☆☆

RAILROAD TYCOON



Price Amiga £35.99
Genre Strategy
Publisher MicroProse

The ACE Benchmark game makes it's way onto the Amiga, and what a fine conversion it is! Building a railroad empire across the USA at the turn of the 20th Century may sound like hard work, but for those who like their strategy to run deep, Sid Meier's simulation of that very pursuit is fun Fun FUN! We know its difficult to imagine how, but trust us, it is. The feeling of power is paramount as you lay your track from sea to shining sea, conduct big-time business and generally earn loads of cash.

Beginning life as an entrepreneur in the early 1800s, you must turn a small stake into the biggest stake in railroad industry history ever! By taking control of every element in the decision making process which makes the railroad work, the player must handle tiny details as well as broader political and economic issues, all at the same time as competing either with a friend or against rival tycoons from history. And every element of the game is represented with top-quality graphics to make even the most number-crunchingly intense sections of the title easy to manage. Meier's excellent user interface and the sheer precision of the game design and balance compared with the top-notch power of the Amiga make this version of the game an outright winner. Highly recommended to all and sundry.

☆☆☆☆☆

RISE OF THE DRAGON



Price Amiga £34.99
Genre Adventure
Publisher Dynamix/Sierra On-Line

Amiga owners have been scrambling to become the first to purchase this-the first or a new wave of Sierra games helmed by the perennially popular Dynamix team. But they should be warned. While Amiga owners get to enjoy just as many visual thrills and plot twists as their PC Pals, they pay the price of swapping ten (count every last one as it slips in and out of your drive for the umpteenth time) disks.

However, if you're willing to pay the access-time price, Rise is an extremely rewarding product. The player takes the role of a futuristic detective, a real Marlowe type, slugging his way through a drug addled city of sleaze, the last remaining obstacle between the mysterious Dragon and total control of the entire planet! Played in first-person perspective, the game uses the no-typing-necessary control interface which Sierra have made their trademark.

This is another example of the interactive movie deal which American companies are so fond of forcing down our throats, but for once it isn't too bad. There is actually a story here! And there is actually some adventuring to do. The player must investigate the strange drug-related death of the Mayor's daughter, interrogate scummy criminals and do all the other stuff that private investigators have to do. Wire taps, opening other people's mail, hanging out in low-rent strip joints. What a life.

And it's all in those lovely hand drawn graphics. Mind you... all those disks... ☆☆☆☆

ROBIN HOOD



Price IBM PC £30.99
Genre Arcade Strategy
Publisher Millennium

Mercilessly coat-tailing the publicity of the recent batch of Lincoln green movies, Millennium's completely unlicensed version of the tale is surprisingly entertaining.

Presented in *Populous* style, the game sticks to the classic storyline of Robin of Locksley being booted out of his lands by the evil Sheriff of Nottingham, deserted by his people and left to fend

for himself.

The player, taking the title role of course, must assemble a band of merry men and set about doing away with the nasty old sheriff once and for all. An equally important goal for the player is to convince all the peasants and other inhabitants of the forest and its environs that Rob isn't the murdering thieving blaggard that the Sheriff has described to them but is a lovely kind hearted soul.

Aside from combat and object-seeking, there's a refreshing amount of genuinely funny dialogue in the game too, with the characters camping up their roles to the best of their ability.

It's an extremely enjoyable and innovative arcade adventure cum strategy cum role playing game who's worst failing could be that the plot is so familiar the player is compelled to play through to the very end as soon as he physically can, thus diminishing the appeal of return visits.

☆☆☆☆

ROBOCOD



Price Amiga £25.99
Genre Platform
Publisher Millennium

And about time too. Computer owners have been waiting a long time for a platform game good enough to wave in the faces of the smug console owners, revoltingly proud of their *Sonics* and their *Marios*. And here it is.

Robocod wins few awards for its originality. There are elements of just about every running n' jumping game from *Manic Miner* onwards in there somewhere, but thanks to careful design and wise mixing and matching of game styles the end result is far more than the sum of its parts.

As in *Mario IV*, the core game task is simple - get from one end of the level to the other, and jump on the heads of any bad guys to wander past. Of course, in practice there's a bit more to it than that. Some of the 70+ levels see Robocod travelling through the levels in a bouncing car, a spluttering prop plane and even an old enamelled bath! There are even some areas where 'Cod swims around - much like he did in the game's prequel *James Pond*.

In fact, it's the sheer variety of the game - along with the superbly smooth control over the fishy main character - that makes it such a joy to play. Every level features something new, either in graphics or gameplay, and there's

little chance of boredom setting in. The wonderfully cute sprites, bright and cheerful backdrops and sing-alongable tunes are excellent too. All in all, Robocod is a polished, playable and - thank God - fun slice of platform pie that you'd have to be criminally insane to let slip by.

☆☆☆☆☆

ROBOCOP 3



Price Amiga £25.99
Genre Arcade Blast
Publisher Ocean

Robocop? In 3D? Nah, it'd never work - would it? Well, the good news is that it does! Indeed, Digital Image Design's unique slant on the *Robocop 3* movie licence arguably make it the best tie-in yet.

In essence, Robocop 3 isn't that different from almost every other film tie-in. It's an amalgam of several game sequences - a bit of shoot-'em-up, a bit of driving, a bit of beat-'em-up - where the simplistic gameplay is compensated for by the sheer variety on offer. However, in this case there's another factor - DID's ground-breaking solid 3D.

Rather than watching some sprites leaping about a 2D backdrop, the player views the world through Robo's eyes as he patrols the streets of Old Detroit on foot, in a police car and even in the air thanks to his new Gyropack. The atmosphere generated, especially in the foot patrol sequences, is quite unbelievable. The only weak links in an otherwise incredibly-strong chain are a couple of feeble hand-to-hand combat sequences with a robotic Ninja assassination - the combat moves are limited and the action sluggish.

However, those sequences apart, there are frequent occasions during the game that the player actually does feel as if he is taking part in a film. And at the end of the day, isn't that what you should be buying a film tie-in for?

☆☆☆☆☆

RODLAND



Price Amiga £25.99
Genre Platform
Publisher Storm

Stomach-emptyingly cute it may be, but there's no denying that Rodland is a fine game. The Jaleco coin-op wasn't

particularly noteworthy, finding itself adrift in a sea of graphically excellent games upon its release. Now, however, the conversion seems to have cropped up when the highest-profile cute game over the moment (*Magic Pockets*) has failed to meet expectations.

The player must work his way through a massive suite of screens, collecting points n' power ups and killing monsters with his rod (hence the name) by bashing them into the floor.

The end of each level is marked by the arrival of an enormous end of level bad guy such as an elephant, who, despite looking about as threatening as a big lump of cotton wool in a knitted bag will do for the players forthwith. Interestingly enough, the player can opt to play a girl if he/she wants, not that it makes much difference to the playing style. And to be honest, the 'boy' looks so bleeding effeminate you'd never know anyway.

Chock-a-block full of excellent visuals, Rodland is a fine conversion and it could even be argued to better its coin-op parent, as control over the characters has been improved. Certainly not a title for gamers into depth or gung-ho blasting, but a nonetheless worthwhile purchase for anyone else.

☆☆☆☆

SARAKON



Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £19.99**
Genre **Puzzle**

Publisher **Virgin Games**

Games which call the player stupid are unlikely to go down in history as great entertainers, yet Sarakon, despite making this fatal mistake is a perfectly decent rip-off of the *Mah Jong* tile-swapping business. Basically, if you imagine *Snap* played with some old oriental tablets and with some complicated 'can't do that' rules, then you're pretty close to imagining what Sarakon is all about.

The aim of the game is to click on similar tablets which sit in a particular orientation, eventually ending up with no tablets left, or at least as few as possible before the time limit runs out. Once done, the player is rewarded with a breakdown of his score and a comment from the computer as to his Sarakon ability.

The problem with these puzzle games, however, is that they all look similar enough to make the player want to pick them up and have a go, yet they insist on containing enough rule subtleties to make doing just that impossible.

The result? The *Mah Jong* player will feel infuriated that he can't make his normal moves work.

The presentation is first class, apart from the cheesy sound effects and music which don't so much create the ambiance of the Far East as a grubby take-away in Dulwich.

If comparatively sedate mouse-clicking is your bag, and your eyes can stand staring at the monitor for ages while you scratch your head, Sarakon is the game for you.

☆☆☆

SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE



Price **IBM PC £40.99**

Genre **Simulation**

Publisher **Lucasfilms/US Gold**

Deep, deep, deep. Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe is a big old game and no mistake. It's also the sequel the critically acclaimed *Their Finest Hour*. The title comes packed with new goodies but brings the same problem of the first game; i.e. the flicky and rather horrible bitmap graphics.

The player is offered the chance to

pilot aircraft in a seemingly limitless number of historical missions, shadowing or guarding planes and taking place in actual battles and scenarios of the Second World War.

However, played in a *Wing Commander* style with bitmaps taking the place of the polygons so frequently and successfully used in other flight sims, Luftwaffe will have all but the owners of the fastest machines hammering down the detail level in the attempt to get it to run at an acceptable rate. Ambitious players can then define their own missions to determine what history would have turned out like if there was just one less Messerschmitt BF109G in a particular combat situation. Luftwaffe is exactly the sort of game - as distinct from *Wing Commander* - that you actually want to make excuses for. And that's simply down to the fact that under the try-too-hard graphics which actually look pretty absurd every now and again, there is a quite brilliant game.

☆☆☆☆☆

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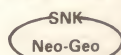
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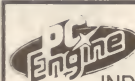
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Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £25.99**

Genre **Puzzle**

Publisher **Infogrames**

Tetris, the game that started it all, may be getting on a bit now, but there's always room for a new puzzle game on the market. The only problem is that the vast majority of puzzlers that have been washing up on these shores from America and Europe have either been of unbearably low quality, or just too weird to get the head round.

Seven Colors from Infogrames, a company that prides itself on its off-the-wallness, fits snugly into the latter category. It's played over a large board made up of hundreds of tiny coloured diamonds where the objective is to change as many diamonds to your colour, spreading them like a virus across the screen, faster than your opponent does. The first player to fill 50% of the screen area is the winner. It's difficult enough to understand when you're actually playing the game, so don't worry if you're a little foggy after that brief explanation.

In fact the major problem with the game is that it's not very easy to understand, and because things just seem to happen it's not very easy to keep track, or indeed to work out what's going on at all. The confusing situa-

tion is further compounded because the instructions hardly explain anything at all. Persistent players may well get something out of it however, and there's a variety of game options to spice up the action if they do. Oh, and there's some very nice in-game classical music which suits the nature of the game perfectly and is very soothing indeed. In fact even if you get bored of the game, it's worth loading up every now again just for its therapeutic aural qualities.

☆☆

SILENT SERVICE II



Price **Amiga £35.99**

Genre **Simulation**

Publisher **Microprose**

It may have taken five years, but the sequel to one of the most critically acclaimed and publicly admired sim games is finally with us. *Silent Service II* features all the best bits from the first game as well as a host of original and new doo-dads.

Digitised graphics and sampled sounds simply confirm the Service as a game which is undoubtedly one of

the most detailed, accurate and realistic on the market, but new gamers should be warned that, just like life on a real submarine, it's not all walking, er, action.

No. There's a lot of the old *Above Us The Waves* stuff with turning off engines to sneak up on enemy warships without alerting their radar. And as for all that tank blowing stuff. I ask you!

Microprose are indubitably the outright kings of all things sim., but their policy of increasing the action and minimising the dial-watching as used to such good effect in *F-15 Strike Eagle II* would be well extended to this particular title.

For gamers wishing to purchase an accurate sub simulation, rest assured, there is absolutely none better. But those expecting to get their torpedoes off straight away would be better to wait for a more accessible equivalent.

☆☆☆☆

SMASH TV



Price **Amiga £25.99**

Genre **Arcade Blast**

Publisher **Ocean**

"Good luck - you're gonna need it" screams the show's oily compere, and never have there been truer words said. This conversion of the incredibly violent Williams coin-op has translated surprisingly well to the home systems, with nearly all the blood and thunder elements so beloved of the original ported across faithfully.

The game takes the form of a futuristic game show, where one or two contestants armed with a rapid-fire gun slug it out with a seemingly endless parade of thugs, freaks and goons to win big money and prizes in a single-screen arena. Power-ups and end-of-zone bad guys add to the already phenomenal carnage.

On a purely visceral level, it's immensely satisfying as the plugged opponents explode into red gobbets of flesh. Indeed, the sprites are small enough to be almost anybody you want them to be, so you can imagine that you're shooting up endless clones of your boss if you want to. Very therapeutic.

As a single-player game it's fine, though there's a serious risk that boredom may well set in worryingly early. The two-player game, on the other hand, is something else. There's not been player-to-player shouting like this

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since *Kick Off 2*.

The coin-op's two joysticks (one to move, one to direct fire) have translated adequately to a single controller, though if you have two there is an option to use both which makes the game far better.

A superb conversion, and more than deserving of your hard-earned pennies. Go to it, you psycho you!
☆☆☆☆

THUNDERHAWK



Price Amiga £30.99

Genre Simulation

Publisher Core Design

Most flight sims require a good deal of practice before any reward can be garnered from them. All those keyboard controls and miscellaneous aircraft functions do quite a lot to put off anyone looking for a quick blast. Core Design have seen this gap in the market and more than adequately filled it with Thunderhawk. All control is via the mouse, which makes everything, from weapon selection to helicopter control, quick and easy. It's a welcome change from the usual memory test of clicks and non-clicks.

The game itself is broken down into a series of campaigns, each preceded by a graphic briefing sequence indicating target and terrain type. Before taking to the sky the player must select the appropriate armament for the Thunderhawk, although there's a default if this seems too much of a chore.

What makes the game a treat is the handling of the helicopter. The controls make flying intuitive, letting the player get on with the mission rather than battling to stay airborne. Graphics are smooth and move at a fair clip, though there isn't much background scenery. If you've never been tempted to try a flight sim, then this is the game to change your attitude.

☆☆☆☆

UTOPIA



Price Amiga £29.99

Genre Arcade Strategy

Publisher Gremlin

The quality of life on earth, let's face it, sucks. And the world is screwed up so bad that nothing anyone can do can save it. We need to start again.

This is the premise of Utopia, another

Populous/Powermonger style affair. Except this time the aim, rather than simply ruling a world or conquering it is to construct and run it and to make all its inhabitants feel really good! The aim is to elevate the quality of life to 100% - Utopia.

It's not difficult to grasp the aims and controls of the game. And it quickly becomes apparent that there are lots of problems thrown up by the idea of making everyone happy. For a start, if you spend all the money on hospitals, food production and month-long sports festivals, your populace will be content, but without any credible defence when the inevitable computer-controlled alien attack occurs.

Beginning from just a few key buildings, it's up to the player to construct the colony using icon-driven actions while inspecting the world in isometric 3D. There are almost no rules in this society. You can run things virtually any way you want.

The only factor that is missing is the option to try and run things as a dictatorship regime and make a certain part of the population very happy while keeping the workers ground down into the dirt. Still, that never works, does it?

☆☆☆☆

VOLFIED



Price Atari ST/Amiga £24.99

Genre Arcade Blast

Publisher Empire

Qix is back in town, and better than ever! No matter how widely tastes may differ among the gamesplaying fraternity, you'd be hard pushed to find anybody who doesn't enjoy a game of good old *Qix*. Its appeal is universal because it's so simple and addictive, and like *Breakout*, its gameplay has stood the test of time. What *Volfied* (converted from Taito's coin-op) represents is a 90s version of the original classic - it is to *Qix* what *Arkanoid* was to *Breakout*, keeping the original framework intact, but adding lots of pretty backdrops, power-ups and extra features.

For the most part it's much the same - draw boxes around the screen to fill up 75% or more of the screen area without the fusewire which makes up the line itself getting hit by any of the marauding enemies - which, instead of the old gyrating line, now takes the form of a giant mothership that roams about spitting about bullets, and a couple

of pesky little helpers. Lasers and speedups are among the collectables, while high-tech backgrounds and SFX provide the aesthetic overhaul.

Since *Qix*-style games are so thin on the ground, *Volfied*, with its classy execution and uncluttered gameplay is a welcome addition to the software scene - and if you've got any sense and admiration for the classics, you'll add it to your collection too.

☆☆☆☆

VROOM



Price Atari ST £24.99

Genre Racing Game

Publisher Lankhor

Without wanting to be nasty to our European counterparts, what with 1992 and all that, it has to be said that most of the software that crosses over from the continent is a bit smelly. *Vroom*, however, from French publisher Lankhor, has proven itself to be the exception to the rule. Although it's not a patch on the likes of *Indianapolis 500* or *Formula One Grand Prix*, *Vroom* is nevertheless a jelly supper racing game, boasting very impressive speed as the player vrooms his way (hence the name) around a first-person environment.

It's got all the usual fixtures and fittings - rear view mirrors, pit-stops, overhead maps, bridges, dips and hills on the track, training modes, qualifying laps, choice of courses and some spectacular crash sequences. It's more of a racing game than simulation, as controls and instrumentation has been kept to a minimum - there's nothing too much to worry about here apart from going very fast, avoiding the other cars and keeping on the road. And it works well enough, being very playable and actually quite compulsive, with the array of racing options adding to the game's longevity. The only dodgy factor is that the joystick option is restricted to the arcade mode - the more serious race options only allow mouse control. Very dodgy indeed. But apart from that, not at all bad.

☆☆☆☆

WILLY BEAMISH



Price IBM PC £34.99

Genre Adventure

Publisher Dynamix/Sierra On-Line

The Adventures of Willy Beamish, to

give it its full name, is somewhat of an oddity. Dubbed an 'interactive cartoon', it's sort of a weird cross between *The Wonder Years* and *The Simpsons*. Willy is the typical all-American trouble-making pre-teen schoolkid, complete with grubby hands, pet frog and accordingly stereotypical family. Strange things are afoot in suburb of Frumpton, and Willy must investigate.

Willy is yet another of those games that sounds a whole lot better than it actually is. That's not to say that it's bad, but the gameplay is very trial-and-error, with luck often playing more of a part than skill or judgment. As such, more time is spent restoring saved games than actually playing, and it can get quite frustrating at times, especially when you have to sit through the comical set-piece for the umpteenth time. As an interactive cartoon, it's excellent, with suitably stereotypical characters, some funny jokes and gorgeous visuals. As a game it's compelling, but not in a way that encourages real addiction or involvement. You're unlikely to come back to again and again.

☆☆☆☆

WING COMMANDER II



Price IBM PC £34.99

Genre Arcade Blast

Publisher Origin

No matter what else you might say about the *Wing Commander* games, they look darned good. The trouble is, there isn't really much else to say about them. Well, perhaps that's a little harsh but here in the sequel to the much talked-about and little-played original, it's very much a case of more of the same.

Interstellar war with the Kilrathi continues, and in the most recent Kilrathi victory, the Confederation flagship *Tiger's Claw* has been destroyed by invisible Kilrathi stealth fighters. As the sole survivor of the assault, the player must first convince his federation comrades that the attack did genuinely take place and then lead a federation force to track them down and destroy them.

Graphically excellent although particularly processor heavy, *Wing Commander II* certainly isn't a brilliant game. It's a worthy sequel to its predecessor but is the sort of title where that trite old phrase about trying before buying is 100% appropriate.

☆☆☆☆

questions, questions...

WIN!

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1) How old are you (tick as appropriate)?

- 12 ☐
13 ☐
14 ☐
15 ☐
16 ☐
17-18 ☐
19-20 ☐
21-25 ☐
26-30 ☐
Over 30 ☐

2) Are you:

- At school ☐
At college ☐
At university ☐
In full-time employment ☐
In part-time employment ☐

3) How frequently do you buy ACE?

- Occasionally ☐
Often ☐
Every issue ☐

4) Which computer(s) do you own?

- Amiga ☐
PC ☐
Atari ☐
Nintendo 8-bit ☐
Sega Master System ☐
Super Famicom ☐
Sega Megadrive ☐
Lynx ☐
Game Gear ☐
Game Boy ☐
Other (please specify) ☐

5) Which, if any, do you intend to buy within the next 6 months?

-
.....
.....
.....

6) Where do you buy your games?

- Mail order ☐
High street store ☐
Independent computer store ☐

7) How much do you spend on games software each month?

- £0-£25 ☐
£26-£50 ☐
£50 or more ☐

8) Do you intend to purchase any of the following over the next 6 months?

- Joystick ☐
Second disk drive ☐
Mouse ☐
Monitor ☐
Sound Card for PC ☐
Memory upgrade ☐
Digitizer ☐

9) Which type of games do you prefer - examples are in brackets -? (You can tick more than one)

- Arcade Blast (Swiv) ☐
Arcade Adventure (Gods) ☐
Sport Simulation (Snooker) ☐
Sports Arcade (Kick Off 2) ☐
Strategy (Civilization) ☐
Beat 'em-up (IK+) ☐
Racing Game (Stunt Car) ☐
Racing Simulation (Formula 1) ☐
Simulation (Chuck Yeager) ☐
Role Playing Games ☐
Adventure (Monkey Island) ☐
Action Strategy (Populous) ☐
Puzzle Games (Tetris) ☐
Platform Game (Mario) ☐

10) What other magazines do you read regularly?

- PC Review ☐
CU Amiga ☐
PC Format ☐
Amiga Format ☐
Amiga Power ☐
Sega Power ☐
Nintendo Power ☐
Computer and Video Games ☐
ST The One ☐
Amiga The One ☐
Zero ☐
Game Zone ☐

Mean Machines ☐

11) How many people other than yourself will read this issue of ACE?

- 1 ☐
2 ☐
3 ☐
4-6 ☐
7 or more ☐

12) Which of these games publishers do you consider to be the best?

- US Gold ☐
Ocean ☐
Gremlin ☐
Image Works/Mirrorsoft ☐
Microprose ☐
Psygnosis ☐
Virgin ☐
Sierra-on-Line ☐
Accolade ☐
Core Design ☐

13) Score the following features in ACE from 1 to 10 (10 being the best)

- News ☐
Letters ☐
In The Works ☐
Gary Whitta's Previews ☐
The 6-Page Screentest ☐
The Console Pages ☐
The Reviews Directory ☐

14) Do you use the Reviews Directory to decide which games to buy?

- Yes ☐ No ☐

Name:.....

Address:.....

.....

.....

If I win I would like software for themachine

Thankyou for your time.

Yes. That's right. We want to know more about the sort of people who read ACE Magazine, and that means YOU. We're so interested in fact, that we're willing to offer TEN readers £200 worth of software, absolutely free. And all you need to do in order to become eligible one of the ten lucky recipients of some top quality software for your machine is to answer the questions below. Come on, don't be shy. By giving us this information, you can help us tweak and twiddle with ACE's finer points and make the magazine absolutely as you like it!

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✿ TO FILL THIS SPACE ✿



Tina Zanelli

on

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READERS PAGES

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Own an ST or Amiga? Hands up if you've completed all of your games. Hmmm, not many. Well maybe "The Directory" is for you. With cheats for over 250 games, it's a snip at £3.00. Send an A5 SAE with Cheque/PO to: Alex Barley 80 George Street, Maulden Bedfordshire MK45DD.

PENPALS

Amiga Atari and VHS contact wanted worldwide. USA especially. Write to Mark 140 Malmesbury Road London E3. No Lamers!!

the blitter end

Ever since Bullfrog Productions' granite-jawed programmer Sean Cooper stepped onto the catwalk in the Clothes Show Model of the Year finals (as reported in the Blitter last month), it seems that all manner of games designers and proggers are queuing up to follow in his footsteps by getting a bit of tasty TV exposure for themselves.

The latest to jump on the media bandwagon is equally hunky and swoon-inducing coder Archer Maclean, who popped in to do a guest spot on ITV's oh-so trendy Saturday morning kidz' show Motormouth this month. Officially he was there to punt his latest game, the rather jolly Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker, but that didn't stop him getting in a few smouldering looks to camera (if not exactly the right camera - it's the one with the red light on, Arch) and generally sending the female members of the audience into a state of eyebrow-fluttering ecstasy. It was probably all that talk about microns and mathematical formula - that always gets the birds going. Blitter would like to clarify a couple of things, however. One, if Archer's game is so bloody clever, how come weedy presenter Andy Crane beat it in a head-to-head potting race? And two, why did Virgin only give Motormouth TWO copies of the game to give away in the competition? Mind how you go, lads, your generosity will get be bankrupt at this rate...

☆

Every now and again, Blitter is reminded just what a roistering bunch of boys the software industry is comprised of. At a recent computer show in Cologne, a trio of top-level delegates from three of the leading software houses decided to have a night on the town - apparently drunkenly meandering around the hotel and filling the lifts up with chairs from the lobby proved to be less than satisfying and they sought entertainment of a boogying nature.

Unfortunately, when they tried to get

into the hotel's nightclub, they were turned away at the door by a hefty bouncer on the account of the fact that they were wearing jeans. So, while one of them argued the toss with the doorman, the other two trotted off, removed their jeans and came back in only their pants. And although this was obviously hilarious, the legendarily humourless German doorman was less than amused and then proceeded to stick one on the third member of the group! The real twist is that while the punched one ran off to the hotel to put some ice on his squished nose, the other two put some proper trousers on and were actually let into the club!

☆

Talking of dodgy goings-on at shows, word reaches us of a very interesting story concerning a certain member of a high-profile programming team. Apparently, while at a games exhibition in France, our celeb found himself temporarily strapped for cash on a night when he was supposed to be going out on the town. So, in desperate need of funds, he took a bunch of T-shirts, scrawled his autograph on each one and knocked them out to starstruck French punters for a hundred francs - £10 in real money - a time! Our man apparently did a roaring trade, and before the night was out had enough quids in his bin to have a right rollicking night out. It just goes to show what you can do when you put your mind to it. Sir John Harvey Jones had better watch out...

☆

Call us old fashioned, but here at ACE we've always assumed that the only way a game could get a Trailblazer award was for the magazine to give it one. This little point is obviously far too stale and old hat for progressive software house Core Design, who went ahead and stuck a Trailblazer logo on

its advertising for viking game Heimdall, even though it only scored 895 last month and therefore didn't receive one. We toyed briefly with the idea of not giving Core's latest, Wolfchild, the Trailblazer it deserves so as to even the score a bit. But Art Editor Jim had already coloured it in, so we didn't have the heart to take it out.

☆

Over the last few months, Blitter has learned a very important lesson - if you get invited to any kind of Mirrorsoft party or function, DON'T GO. They're jinxed. Initially we thought it was just an isolated incident when a certain member of the ACE team had a bit of extremely bad luck a few months back at a Mirrorsoft dinner. But then word reaches us that Amiga Power editor Matt Bielby and Sega Power dep-ed Neil "Tesco's" West also seem also to have the dreaded Curse of Mirrors upon them.

Returning from a Mirrorsoft bash a few months back, the pair were ambushed (and thoroughly outnumbered, we are told) by a group of muggers and roughed up. And only this month, while on the way home from another Mirrorsoft party during Future Publishing's World of Commodore Show, the hapless pair were set upon once again. This time a mysterious solitary Scotsman set about the feisty duo, dealing out a couple of wobbly-leg inducing knuckle sandwiches. This, we feel, makes Neil and Matt the most unsuccessful tag team in software history. If you read any reviews by them of Ocean's WWF over the next couple of months, don't pay any attention because they obviously don't know what they're talking about.

☆

Staying with Mirrorsoft for a bit longer, it seems that not everyone who has contact with the company is completely unlucky. Take the aforementioned

Commodore Show party for instance. Though a generous amount of money was put behind the bar, it didn't take long for it to get drunk. Actually, it didn't take anybody very long to get drunk. But anyway, the story is when the free booze finally ran out and the drinks started costing, the poor little waifs at Strangeways Software couldn't afford to get another round in.

A hasty whip-round yielded only two out-of-date Travelcards, a Fruit Pastille and three pence in real money. But never fear! All that was required was a quick trip over to see Mirrorsoft's roly-poly Marketing Director Sean Brennan, and suddenly the boys were back in business. Big-hearted Sean whipped out his wad and peeled off two crisp twenties of his own money for the boys to go and have a drink with. It seems Captain Cash's days are numbered. So if you're short of a few bob, why not give Sean a call at the usual Mirrorsoft number and no doubt he'll be happy to give you some free money.

☆

Andrew Braybrook has written a new game! Unfortunately you won't be able to play it - unless of course you trot along to a new exhibition that's being organised by Powergen. It's all to do with a new power station that's being opened by David Bellamy or something. It's called RoboPower, and you have to run around this power station collecting coal and stuff - you know the sort of thing. So there you go.

☆

We just remembered something else about Neil from out of Sega Power. He's so unlucky that he can't even get into his own party! Once again, it all happened at the Commodore Show, when organisers Future were staging an ultra-exclusive and chic party in the London Dungeons for their top industry mates. Though everyone knew invites were intended for top geezers only, Neil was apparently shooting his mouth off about how he was going to get in, no sweat. But when he turned up on the night, Future top boys Greg Ingham and Steve Carey steadfastly refused to let him in! But never mind, we're sure he had lots of other hot industry parties to go to. And as an added bonus, Neil is now honourably enrolled in the Tom Watson order of Unsuccessful Party Gatecrashers.

● Blit Blit!

Look out - he's back!

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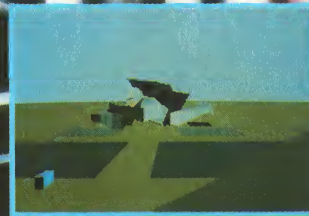
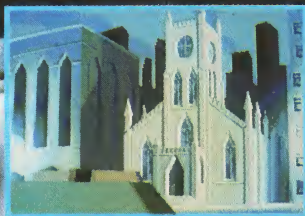
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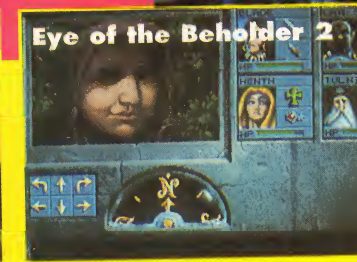
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